

Leveraging employee experience insights for
the mastery of the performance management
paradox

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paradox

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Abstract

The persistent demand for performance and its adverse impact on the employee experience form the crux of a complex and enduring challenge for management. As organisations pursue ever-greater productivity and efficiency – be it to survive or to thrive – the resultant working conditions can paradoxically diminish their employees’ will and ability to perform at their peak. Ultimately, this is neither ideal for people nor performance.

This thesis explores this persistent challenge, drawing on employees’ personal experiences with the aim of providing insights to help managers master it for the mutual benefit of their colleagues and organisation. To achieve this, it presents a revelatory mixed-methods case study of a technology and travel company operating throughout the United Kingdom (UK).

The study’s findings are structured across four results chapters. First, documentary evidence provides an instantiation of the performance management paradox within a specific organisational context. Next, partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) based on questionnaire data from 184 employees suggests that perceived high-performance management activity can positively influence employees’ combined work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction. This relationship is partially mediated by employees’ perceptions of their organisation’s relational character (e.g., trustworthiness and supportiveness), but not its aspirational character (e.g., ambitiousness and achievement-orientation). To further support practical application, importance-performance map analysis (IPMA) highlights how managers can harness employees’ perceptions to improve organisational conditions for both people and performance.

Following this, thematic analysis of research interviews with 25 employees explores the factors influencing their decisions to work where they do. The findings highlight core practical, personal, and relational reasons for coming to, staying at, and leaving an organisation. These insights provide a nuanced understanding of the employee experience, offering practical implications for how managers can instil in employees the confidence that they are working for an organisation that works for them.

Lastly, a thought experiment that treats the interviewed employees as “internal consultants” leads to the development of the ACTION framework for management, which comprises 6 actions that appear essential for ensuring employees are both optimally happy and productive at work – to *appreciate*, *care*, *talk*, *involve*, *orient*, and *nurture*. While acknowledging that the performance management paradox cannot be resolved, this study argues that aligning management practice with these core principles can help managers work through the daily challenges it poses.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

At the beating heart of an organisation exists an entanglement of its demand for performance and how this is experienced by its people. While organisations strive to increase productivity and efficiency, the strain that this exerts on employees can often lead to adverse outcomes for their well-being. For example, studies have shown that intense workloads, high-performance expectations, and lean operations can result in increased symptoms of ill-health such as stress, fatigue, and burnout (Carter et al., 2013; Evenstad, 2015; Traunmüller et al., 2019). Further, there is also evidence to suggest that, ironically, in some instances even work-related wellness initiatives designed to remedy such symptoms can inadvertently exacerbate the issue, as employees become frustrated that their employer is not addressing what they see to be the source of the issue in the organisation (Secchi et al., 2015; Spence, 2015).

While the strain of performance demands is unquestionably a concern for employees, growing evidence suggests that it also poses a risk to organisational performance (Peccei and Van De Voorde, 2019; Pagán-Castaño et al., 2020). For organisations to secure their future success, they arguably need ‘peak performance in the present’ from their people (Smith and Lewis, 2011: 382). But, when employees feel overburdened or undervalued at work, understandably their capacity and motivation to contribute to their organisation diminishes (Van Woerkom and Meyers, 2015; De Smet et al., 2021), which implies that they will not be performing at their peak. This suggests that certain strategies intended to optimise performance can inadvertently erode employees’ potential to perform for the organisation, thereby undermining the very goal they seek to achieve (Stohl and Cheney, 2001). In other words, compromising the employee experience is inconducive to harnessing the full investment of employees – the full force of the workforce, as it were.

Extensive research in organisation and management literature identifies best practices aimed at resolving this issue. Studies propose a range of human resource management (HRM) strategies, leadership styles, and workplace initiatives that are beneficial for employees and organisations in tandem (e.g., Miragaia and Aleixo, 2021; Katou, 2022; Samad et al., 2022). Yet, as this thesis demonstrates, these ideals are often at odds with the

reality that employees experience (Pfeffer, 2014; Alvesson, 2020). Indeed, it would seem that organisations frequently fall short of delivering a positive employee experience (Cornelius et al., 2022), which would suggest that much of the potential for mutual gains for people and performance revealed in scholarship is seldom realised in everyday organisational life.

Given the dual impact that this can have on both the people and performance of an organisation, this gap between the abundance of management theory on how to optimise the employee experience and the evident widespread incapacity to do so indicates the presence of a paradox in management practice. Paradoxes are said to manifest in organisations as a result of ‘persistent contradiction between interdependent elements’ (Schad et al., 2016: 10), and an organisation’s people and performance are two such elements. They are each elemental to the organisation insofar as they are fundamental to its success, and they are interdependent insofar as they are ‘bound together’ by their mutual reliance and influence upon each other (Smith and Berg, 1987: 14). Yet, while the field of management increasingly understands the dynamic interplay between an organisation’s financial or market performance and the human experience and well-being of its performers (Glover et al., 2023), still managers struggle to prevent these interacting imperatives from clashing and, thereby, curtailing their combined potential (Loon et al., 2019).

Paradoxes are said to be unresolvable by definition (Hahn and Knight, 2021a). Yet, as Lewis (2000: 765) suggests, while a seemingly inescapable paradox can be ‘the subject of inquiry’, it can also provide ‘*the guiding framework*’ to improve circumstances affected by it. Observing paradox affords the opportunity to think differently about managerial problem-solving by recognising the enduring organisational dysfunction of persistently competing demands, which permits a fuller appreciation of the managerial challenge of serving such demands simultaneously. In the case of the performance management paradox, this perspective shows how managers are continually responding to the tension between the organisational pursuit of performance enhancement (a constant) and the adverse experience of this demand by employees. However, while the paradox perspective by definition sees no resolution to this tension in the sense of a final end or absolute answer, since the earliest contributions to paradox management scholarship (e.g., Van de Ven, 1983; Quinn, 1988), there has been an unwavering determination to aid managers, employees,

and organisations to not merely ‘cope with’ tensions, but to ‘thrive through’ them (Lewis and Smith, 2014: 135). It is this real but impossible ambition that animates the present inquiry.

Recent growing interest in the employee experience in both management scholarship and practice suggests that a closer consideration of work life from the perspective of employees may offer valuable insight into how management might master this paradox. Malik et al. (2023: 98), for example, suggest that the employee experience may be ‘the missing link’ between management and positive outcomes for both people and performance by inspiring and enabling greater engagement. Further, Plaskoff (2017: 137) argues that ‘the quality of employee experiences has a direct influence on employee satisfaction, engagement, commitment, and, in the end, performance’. In essence, this perspective argues that managers who better understand their people are better equipped to encourage them to contribute to and remain with their organisation (Itam and Ghosh, 2020).

Despite the increasing recognition of the employee experience as a crucial component of organisational success, the stark mismatch between theoretical ideals and employees’ lived realities suggests that management still has much to learn from this perspective. While scholarship highlights the potential mutual benefits of management practices attuned to the employee experience, much of this research remains abstracted, focusing on best practices rather than the nuanced reality of management as employees perceive it.

This thesis seeks to address this omission, with the aim of generating novel insight from the employee perspective for managers throughout the ranks to leverage for the mutual benefit of their organisation’s people and performance. To achieve this, the investigation follows a mixed methods case study of a single UK-based organisation operating in both the technology and travel sectors (pseudonymised as Solet). This approach is particularly well-suited to exploring a paradoxical problem – or what Luscher and Lewis (2008: 227) refer to as ‘an intricate, fluid, and fuzzy issue’ – within a real-world organisational context (Yin, 2014). Solet and its participating employees provided the context and personal perspectives to explore the problem at the interface of the organisation and the people who work to make it what it is. Founded in 1991 as a mother-and-son venture in Northern England, Solet has grown into a profitable, technology-driven holiday letting company. In its current designation as the UK Core Agency division within a private equity-backed corporate group,

Solet certainly possesses a degree of uniqueness that makes it different from all other companies (Tsoukas, 2017). But it is also a company much like many others, being ‘produced and renewed’ by its people who work together every day (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989: 564), and from whom management can gain a wealth of insight into paradox management.

A central question that this investigation seeks to understand is how management can simultaneously serve both the people and performance of their organisation (research question 1). Using questionnaire-based statistical modelling, this research identifies performance-oriented management actions (de Waal, 2012a) that appear to enhance employees’ combined work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction (commonly referred to as happiness at work, Fisher, 2010). Additionally, the analysis shows how employee’s perceptions of their organisation’s relational character (e.g., its supportiveness and trustworthiness), rather than its aspirational character (e.g., its ambitiousness and achievement-orientation), mediate this relationship between perceived management action and employee reaction. The heavily perception-dependent nature of the mechanism simultaneously highlights the potential and limitation of managers to respond to organisational performance demands through the employee experience. This finding, however, also suggests that the employee experience is as potentially insightful as it is influential, making it a valuable resource for developing strategies that serve both people and performance. Accordingly, the statistical technique of importance-performance map analysis (IPMA, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2016), as used in this investigation, is recommended as a versatile tool to inform this practice, as it can provide managers with precise focal points for reflection and corrective action.

Further, recognising that managers are not the sole architects of the employee experience, this study also explores the question of why employees come to, stay at, and leave their organisation (research question 2). To move beyond the predominantly logico-deductive, questionnaire-based statistical approach – which tends to focus on narrow aspects of the employee experience and risks distancing research from lived realities (Alvesson, 2020) – this question is addressed primarily through thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews exploring employees’ reasons for working where they do and their overall happiness there. This approach adopts a neutral and open holistic experiential perspective (Batat, 2022),

incorporating Heidegger's (1962: 172) concept of Dasein or 'Being-there' to interpret human experience in the organisational context.

The analysis suggests that employees are drawn to and remain at an organisation where they find convenience; concordance with their personality, personal values, and ambition; opportunities for meaningful social and/or functional contribution; and consideration from colleagues. Additionally, the financial constraint of wage dependency is shown to force employees to stay at or leave their organisation against their preference. It is argued that each of these variables has the potential to significantly influence the extent to which employees invest themselves in an organisation, presenting nuanced implications for how managers – at all levels – can work with these simultaneous forces to capitalise on their positive potential. It is further argued that the consideration that managers can give their employees – through both systematic and dynamic practices – can instil in employees confidence to continue contributing their time, effort, and expertise to the organisation (Itam and Ghosh, 2020).

Finally, by adopting a "paradox mindset" that seeks 'both/and strategies' to manage persistent tensions (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018: 27), this research also considers what is essential from management when working through the performance management paradox (research question 3). In response to calls for research that sustains the 'vibrant and polyphonic' nature of paradox studies (Cunha and Putnam, 2019: 97), this question is explored through the underutilised method of empirically-informed thought experimentation (Aguinis et al., 2023). In this thought experiment, Solet's interviewed employees acted as "internal consultants", offering their firsthand insights on how managers might navigate the performance management paradox by ensuring both optimal employee happiness and productivity (Staw, 1986). This combined empirical and conceptual process elicited the ACTION framework – to *appreciate, care, talk, involve, orient, and nurture* – as a simple yet memorable guide for managerial reflection and action. While it is accepted that this framework cannot "resolve" the paradox, per se, it is argued that integrating its tenets into future management research, education, and practice could nevertheless help managers to 'work through' the daily challenges of people and performance management (Lewis and Smith, 2014: 135).

The following two chapters present a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to this investigation. Chapter 2 begins by tracing over a century of research on people and performance management, revealing how efforts to enhance performance can paradoxically generate negative consequences for employees, which ultimately undermine performance itself. It then explores theoretical perspectives on the employee experience, offering a holistic view that critiques rigid distinctions between happiness and well-being in workplace-based research. Thereafter, it integrates the employee experience perspective into the performance management paradox to illustrate its pivotal influence on both positive and negative organisational outcomes.

Based on the emerging importance of the employee experience in performance management, Chapter 3 subsequently explores the potential for management to produce mutual gains for both employees and organisations. While the literature presents numerous strategies for achieving mutual gains, a critical review of questionnaire-based data reveals that these ideals are often unrealised in practice. This chapter proposes an experiential model along with the three research questions to advance understanding on how the employee experience can help managers navigate paradoxicality in performance management.

Chapter 4 then sets out the empirical methodology and methods applied in this investigation. It begins by establishing the theoretical lens before justifying the pragmatic approach taken to address the research problem. It then explains the choice of a convergent mixed (quantitative and qualitative) methods case study design and its underlying scientific reasoning. The specific data collection and analysis methods are then detailed, followed by a discussion of the study's ethical considerations. Finally, it provides a brief outline of the forthcoming results chapters.

Chapters 5 through 8 comprise the results chapters. Chapter 5 provides documentary evidence of the performance management paradox in Solet, illustrating its real-world manifestation and the company's employee experienced-based strategies to mitigate its effects while sustaining performance. Chapter 6 reports the results of the exploratory statistical modelling using questionnaire data to test and refine a proposed experiential model developed through the literature review. Chapter 7 then examines the factors influencing employees' decisions to come to, stay at, and leave their organisation,

developing through this a theory of self-movement based on practical, personal, and relational forces influencing the employee experience. Finally, Chapter 8 presents a thought experiment in which the employees of Solet serve as “internal consultants” offering their expert reflections on managerial actions that support a proactive and constructive response to the paradox.

Chapter 9 then synthesises the insights gathered throughout this investigation with the broader literature on paradox and employee experience. This discussion begins by examining the enduring nature of the paradox through the system-inherent, socially constructed, and probabilistic theoretical interpretations. It then addresses the study’s three core research questions, concluding with reflections on this investigation’s contributions, limitations, and recommendations with respect to management research and practice.

Chapter 2. Literature review A – Unearthing the pivotal role of the employee experience in the performance management paradox: a conceptual review

This first literature review chapter establishes the conceptual foundation for the thesis. It begins by expounding the research problem – the performance management paradox – through a synthesis of historical and contemporary management scholarship on the matter. In doing so, it reveals the employee experience as a pivotal but underexplored dimension of this persistent challenge for management, which provides the basis for exploring it in the context of paradox management.

The chapter is structured into three key sections. The first section presents a synthesis of over a century of scholarship in people and performance management, highlighting the persistent tension between organisational efforts to enhance performance and the adverse experience of these by employees. This examination illustrates how attempts to enhance organisational performance can often generate paradoxical effects, through their negative impact on employee will and ability to work well for the organisation.

Due to the integral role of the employee experience in the performance management paradox, the second section shifts focus to the burgeoning literature on this nascent theoretical perspective. This section reviews a variety of contemporary definitions of the employee experience, combining these into a holistic, egological perspective that incorporates both introspective and extrospective aspects of workplace well-being. This part of the review also critically examines the problematic tendency in adjacent fields to separate happiness and well-being into rigid subcategories, which risks distancing research from authentic subjective experiences of *all being well* in one's world (of work). By deconstructing the logic upon which these distinctions stand, it is argued that this popular conceptual exercise may hinder rather than help theoretical development in the emerging employee experience paradigm.

Finally, the third section reintegrates the employee experience into the performance management paradox to firmly establish its deterministic role in both the positive and

negative dynamics of performance management. The chapter then closes with a summary that stresses the need for further research into the employee experience such that management may be able to capitalise upon this pivotal perspective for the mutual benefit of people and performance.

2.1. Expounding the performance management paradox

Performance management is a task seemingly steeped in paradox. While it could be assumed that any organisation 'seeks to achieve the highest level of performance and excellence' (Al-Dhaafri and Alosani, 2020: 2498), in practice this particular *raison d'être* is not so straightforwardly attained. This is because performance excellence requires the simultaneous and continuous mastery of multiple, interrelated dimensions that collectively contribute to 'organisational prosperity' (Al-Abrrow et al., 2019: 976). Recurring themes among frameworks designed to capture organisational performance excellence include maximising stakeholder satisfaction (internal and external), continuous performance improvement, process optimisation, knowledge management, leadership, and workforce management (Zink, 2008; Al-Abrrow et al., 2019; Al-Dhaafri and Alosani, 2020). An organisation that seeks to exceed itself and its competition by mastering all of the above crucial aspects of business conduct calls not only for exceptional effort and achievement, but also expert management to both inspire and enable the employees of the organisation to perform for it within a dynamic agora of human interaction (Quinn, 1988; Lewis and Smith, 2014).

Over a century of scholarship recognising the sheer challenge of this task reveals a primary hallmark of paradox: a persistence of tension with problematic consequences (Hahn and Knight, 2021a). Several early 20th Century pioneers of management, namely Jane Addams, Fredrick Taylor, and Whiting Williams, addressed the unrelenting conflict between "management" and the "workforce" in industrial organisations at the time. For example, in her writings concerning fraught industrial relations, Addams (1902) lamented the apparent inability of the owners and workers of companies to achieve a sustained state of mutual satisfaction with their employment relationship. As she remarks, 'we have not yet learned to act together' despite 'aimless attempts to find a common method of action' (Addams, 1902:

137). Some years after, while introducing his theory of scientific management, Taylor (1919: 10) echoed Addams' observations, stating that 'there is no question that, throughout the industrial world, a large part of the organization of employers, as well as employés, is for war rather than for peace'. Similarly, Williams (1920), through his unorthodox research approach of undercover ethnography, came to similar conclusions about the difficulties that management faces in balancing the simultaneous demands of an organisation's people and performance. Ultimately, Williams (1920: 315) accepted that 'there can be no easy way out of the industrial problem'.

Many decades after the observations of the above trio of pioneering management consultants, researchers continued to note the underlying paradoxical nature of performance management. For example, in considering how to manage an organisation so that employees can be both happy and productive, Staw (1986: 40) prefaced his work with the caveat possibility of this idealistic objective being 'an impossible dream' due to 'inevitable worker-management conflict'. Further, from a more critical perspective around the same time, Sloan (1987) challenged organisational agents on their apparent inability to see where they may be systematically negatively impacting their people while purportedly endeavouring to support them to be at their best. Staw's (1986) recognition of the potential incapability of managers to attain and sustain peak worker productivity and happiness parallels Sloan's (1987) identification of a managerial "blind spot" in the holistic employee experience (Batat, 2022). Together, they allude to the potential for inadvertent and counterproductive undermining effects to occur in the process of organising, despite even the best laid and well-intentioned plans (Ybema, 1996; Stohl and Cheney, 2001; Sundaramurthy and Lewis, 2003).

Around the same time, in their acclaimed book (*In Search of Excellence*) that is said to have given rise to the field of paradox studies in management and organisation (see Van de Ven, 1983; Gannon, 1990), Peters and Waterman (1982: 248) were clear that excellent organisations shared an ethos of 'productivity through people, pure and simple'. This straightforward observation articulates the entanglement of people and performance in management (Hahn and Knight, 2021a); that is, to manage one is to manage the other. In their assessment of highly successful organisations in the United States at the time, the authors noted among them a predisposition to 'treat their rank and file as the root source of

quality and productivity gain' (Peters and Waterman, 1982: 14). They went on to write that, in practice, this requires 'a plethora of structural devices, systems, styles, and values, all reinforcing one another... to achieve extraordinary results through ordinary people' (Peters and Waterman, 1982: 238-9).

Problematically, however, amid this complex mix of organisational elements in the contemporary world of work, certain measures through which the management of organisations attempt to enhance performance have been shown to have adverse (paradoxical) effects upon employees – the organisation's performers. For example, Wilkinson (2005) highlights that dramatic downsizing (or "rightsizing" as it is sometimes called) may be less a surefire strategy for efficiency and more an act of organisational self-harm than one may immediately assume. Evidence from the study of Grunberg et al. (2000), which surveyed employees who survived layoffs, is indicative of such potentially long-lasting ill-effects in the aftermath. Their findings suggest that the perceived unfairness of layoffs among those who remained was negatively associated with their expressions of commitment to the organisation (Grunberg et al., 2000). In this example of the so-called "survivor syndrome" (George and Maheshwari, 2024), employees effectively withdrew themselves by reducing their commitment to an organisation that seems less committed to its employees in general. Therefore, while it may appear clear on the company accounts that workforce reductions equate to savings in the short run by reducing overheads, the longer-term picture becomes less obvious once the cost of lost workforce morale, loyalty, and know-how, coupled with increased scepticism and stress, are factored into the equation (Wilkinson, 2005). The negative impact that such severe measures may have on the employee experience may feed into organisational outcomes in ways less easily itemised on the books.

In the same vein, Jackson and Martin (1996) found that the implementation of *just-in-time*, an inventory system designed to reduce costs by streamlining operations, also increased production pressure upon employees and reduced job satisfaction. In addition, de Koeijer et al. (2014: 2912) identified that the strategy of *lean management*, which intends to reduce 'waste and resources while improving customer satisfaction and financial results', can have similarly detractive effects on a workforce. The authors noted an association between the implementation of *lean* strategies and a reduction in employee trust and well-being (de

Koeijer et al., 2014), which are outcomes suggestive of a worker's waning will and ability to perform at their peak for the organisation. Moreover, Evenstad (2015: 60) found in their more general analysis of the implied expectation of employees to 'be excellent' that this was experienced by them as an increasing demand to 'do more with less'. The implications of this were that the employees felt that their organisation was ultimately understaffed, which meant that they were given excessive workloads and unrealistic deadlines until they felt burnt out and accordingly checked out (Evenstad, 2015).

As a burgeoning body of research shows the impact of employee experiences upon performance outcomes (Van de Voorde et al., 2012; Pagán-Castaño et al., 2020), the above findings indicate the potential presence of self-undermining effects resulting from organisational-level attempts to reduce expenditure, streamline processes, and maximise productivity (Stohl and Cheney, 2001). This suggests that many performance-enhancing or cost-saving initiatives may not be quite the strategic panaceas that they initially appear to be once negative employee 'thoughts, feelings, and sensory experiences' factor in future organisational ongoings (Tsoukas, 2017: 147). When seen through this lens of living experience of unfavourable employment conditions, it becomes clearer how managers may find themselves battling the negative dynamics of paradox in their organisation. Whether it is through the detractive psychophysiological effects of overstress (Traunmüller et al., 2019) or abience exhibited through mechanisms such as 'quiet quitting' (Serenko, 2024: 28), as holistic worker well-being wanes so too does the organisation's chance of harnessing the full potential of its people.

Indeed, it seems that organisational decision-makers have grown increasingly aware of the causal influence of workforce well-being upon performance. To counter the potential ill-effects of high-performance pressures, it is now rather standard to see organisations offering a suite of solutions to directly bolster worker well-being. From an organisational cost-benefit perspective, these comprise strategies that endeavour to ensure employees feel well to work well and are ultimately happy at work, and thus happy to work (Fisher, 2010).

However, intriguingly and rather ironically, attempts to augment overall organisational performance through targeted employee well-being management may also (paradoxically) feed counterproductivity. For example, when an employing organisation involves itself in the personal matters of its people, some of them may perceive this to be overstepping personal-

professional boundaries (Secchi et al., 2015; Ehrhardt and Ragins, 2019), especially if the individuals in question see the organisation as the reason for their ill-being (Evenstad, 2015). Similarly, as the critical perspectives of Holmqvist (2009) and Sherratt (2015) suggest, while some employees may receive well-being interventions well, others may see them as disingenuous exercises of corporate social *control* rather than sincere acts of corporate social *responsibility*, which could worsen personal perceptions of the organisation overall. Gestures so negatively received in this way could reasonably beget abient reaction formation (Lewis, 2000). Accordingly, the intended mutual gains for people and performance stemming from such endeavours may be less pronounced than anticipated or even amount to a waste of time and money (Berry et al., 2010; Kaspin et al., 2013).

Specific workplace well-being interventions designed to help employees ‘better cope with workplace stress’ (Avey et al., 2009: 677), are of course not necessarily problematic in themselves. However, their contribution to the paradoxicality of performance management may lie in how they address associated *symptoms*, but perhaps not the root *source*, of sub-optimal performance. Despite scholars such as Staw (1986) and Sloan (1987) raising this issue of the organisation’s potentially negative impact upon its people some time ago, targeted individualistic well-being-for-performance programs have proliferated in organisational contexts (Guest, 2017; Adamovic, 2018). The implementation of such interventions essentially subscribes to the idea that “corporate athletes” can be crafted by training their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual faculties (Loehr and Schwartz, 2001). Examples of these initiatives include workplace-based meditation (SchmidtWilk et al., 1996), cognitive behavioural therapy (Carolan et al., 2017), resilience training (Tonkin et al., 2018), advice on how to sleep and eat (Whitmore et al., 2018), mindfulness (Bartlett et al., 2019), and physical activity (Miragaia and Aleixo, 2021). All these above-cited studies have shown that such interventions can help treat the well-being discomfort of work demands, and for that reason are worth considering. Yet, within the bigger picture, if the origin of the need to intervene in well-being is rooted at least in part in the way that an organisation habitually treats its people for performance gains, such small-scale interventions may only provide a temporary or partial buffer (Sloan, 1987) or have no substantive impact at all (Spence, 2015). Strategies to this effect may therefore ‘eventually intensify tensions’ (Lewis, 2000:

762) once the newly gained or further strained worker well-being resources become loaded up with more of the same company challenges down the line.

Long before the turn of interest towards employee well-being, however, management science and practice began seeking to understand how to motivate workers to perform at their best. This is essentially because to study human motivation is to study what drives people to exert their energy in a particular direction, with a certain intensity and perseverance. Motivation is therefore central to people and performance management, as it can be variably conducive or counter to organisational objectives. Indeed, much managerial interest in workplace well-being likely stems from the interest in knowing what drives employees' efforts towards organisational performance goals (Guest, 2017). This can be seen in the way that seminal well-being theories feature within the branch of motivational theory which focuses on core human needs or desires that comprise the essential content of motivation. The inborn *desire* to experience a holistic sense of self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1980), self-acceptance, and mastery (Ryff, 1989), through achievement (McClelland, 1961; Seligman, 2011), personal growth (Maslow, 1971; Ryff and Singer, 2008), and affirmation of competence and autonomy (McGregor, 1960; Ryan and Deci, 2001; Gagné and Deci, 2005; Ryff, 2014), as well as the fundamental *need* of safety and security (Maslow, 1962; Alderfer, 1969) and positive relationships (all above-listed works) are but some of the many themes that are said to represent the essence of human motivation and well-being.

Further prominent motivation theories concern the rational decision-making processes that determine individual behaviour. A seminal model in management is expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), which takes a prospective view of motivation by proposing that the stronger someone believes their action will lead to a desired outcome (expectancy), and the more they value said outcome (valence), the more motivated they will be to take action to realise it. Often recalled alongside expectancy theory is equity theory (Adams, 1965), which takes a retrospective view of human behaviour as occurring in reaction to the feeling of inequity (unfairness or injustice), which triggers activity to restore the balance. Furthermore, core to many theories of motivation is the underlying idea that work – as effort – is directed towards the attainment of goals (Hannagan, 2005). Based principally on the work of Locke (1968),

this intuitive notion posits that people innately ‘strive to achieve goals in order to satisfy their emotions and desires’ (Mullins and Rees, 2023: 251)¹.

These theories, whether focused on intrinsic satisfaction or extrinsic reward, have factored in countless managerial interventions – from incentive schemes to job enrichment programmes – designed to align individual motivation with organisational performance. Yet, despite their sophisticated conceptual basis, such interventions often struggle to deliver sustained positive impact. This is not necessarily due to flaws in the theories themselves, but rather to the complex and conflict-laden terrain in which managers strategically seek to implement them.

Studies suggest that despite the rich and intricate understanding of the will of the workforce that motivation theories offer, still organisations are experiencing a malaise of demotivation among their ranks. This limitation of the field can be seen in surveys of various indicators of the overall employee experience, which indicate that people are often not feeling particularly motivated to perform at their best in their role for the organisation. For example, The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2017) reported that more than a third of the workforce (36%) across public, private, and voluntary sectors in the UK were not satisfied with their job. Similarly, the Gallup (2025) State of the Global Workplace report found that only around one fifth (21%) of employees globally were engaged, only one third (33%) felt that they were thriving, and half (50%) were watching for or actively seeking a new job. These are all strong indicators derived directly from employees’ experiences that suggest that swathes of people are not particularly motivated to invest their human resources into the organisation.

Motivation theory can go some way to explaining why this may be the case. For example, where an individual’s sense of inequity at work manifests, this can lead them to reduce their input by intentionally doing less (quiet quitting) or quitting altogether. Further, where there is an agreed-upon goal, it is reasonable that an employee might respond negatively in terms of work engagement or organisational commitment if they feel that the goal posts have

¹ Indeed, goal-directedness is arguably a primordial human tendency, as is recognised in Aristotle’s (1999: 3) opening to *The Nichomachean Ethics*, where he begins with the words, ‘Every art and every investigation, and likewise every practical pursuit or undertaking, seems to aim at some good: hence it has been well said that the Good is That at which all things aim.’ Heidegger (1962: 24) echoes this in *Being and Time* with the words, ‘Every seeking gets guided before-hand by what is sought’. The goal is the sought good that leads the pursuit; it becomes the perceived object in mind towards which one aims to move.

been moved unfairly or without sufficient justification. Yet, where a recent CIPD (2023) survey revealed the highest absence rates in a decade, along with more than two thirds (67%) of respondents citing “volume of work” and more than a third (37%) blaming “management style” as the cause of stress-related absence, it can be seen in the modern world of work that though managers may understand employee motivation in theory, leveraging it in practice proves altogether far harder.

This theory-practice disjunct suggests that enablement of the workforce to exert their ‘force’ or ‘behaviour potential’ (Vroom, 1964: 18) in service of organisational demands is not an easily rationalised and calculable phenomenon. The CIPD (2017; 2023) and Gallup (2025) findings suggest that this is principally because the organisational demands to which workers are subject often prevent the unleashing of human potential and application of the workforce necessary to meet the demands. Factors abound to complexify immensely the employee’s experience of their employment relationship, such as competing interests, power asymmetries, and structural inequalities (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004). From the view that a substantive part of motivation is determined by the force within a person (self-determination), while another substantive part is determined by environmental forces outside and beyond their control (Adair, 2006), management requires a comprehensive view of the employee experience as more than a neutral backdrop to introduce motivational incentives.

Pluralist (Fox, 1966) and radical (Fox, 1974) perspectives have long emphasised that cooperation and conflict coexist in organisational life, and that the efficacy of managerial attempts to motivate workers is highly contingent on how employees interpret and enact their roles (Simon, 1991). Moreover, critiques of the ongoing financialisation of work suggest that efforts to augment performance through employee well-being and motivational interventions are undermined by broader economic logics that prioritise short-term returns over employee-organisation relational engagement. Thompson (2013), for example, argues that due to dominating financial pressures, modern-day managers are given the task of deriving high performance from labour while fundamentally lacking the capacity to sustain the enabling conditions required to do so. From this it can be seen how superseding shareholder imperatives can undermine relational foundations necessary to sustain high levels of well-being, motivation, and performance – such as trust, security, and perceived

fairness. As Lazonick (2017: 4) suggests, this capitalistic hegemony habitually generates ‘employment instability, income inequity, and slowing productivity’ as predatory value extraction jeopardises value creation.

In this light, even the most well-designed well-being or motivational interventions may inadvertently feed the paradox of performance management or at least fail to attenuate its ill effects. By seeking to elicit greater effort without adequately accounting for the holistic employee experience, they risk creating or persisting conditions inconducive to great work, in terms of both experience and output. This review does not attempt to re-theorise motivation or employment relations in full but instead adopts an egological lens that foregrounds the idiographic, situated experience of employees. It is through this lens that the paradox at hand is examined – not as a failure of theory, but as a failure to account for how theory is lived.

Ultimately, the interplay between organisational efforts to enhance performance and the subsequent effects on employee well-being forms the crux of a complex and enduring issue for management. As has been shown in this conceptual foundation section, historical and contemporary evidence alike point to a challenging and likely imperfectible situation. Organisational paradoxes are said to form through the nexus of contradictory yet interdependent demands that exist simultaneously and persist over time (Smith and Lewis, 2011: 382; Hahn and Knight, 2021a: 362). In accordance with this view, the performance management paradox can be defined as: *the unresolved tension between an organisation’s pursuit of performance enhancement and the adverse experience of this demand by its employees. This paradox arises from the constant need to manage various entangled aspects of business conduct to sustain the organisation (e.g., stakeholder satisfaction, process optimisation, and workforce inspiration and enablement) within a dynamic and latently conflictive environment. Consequently, endeavours to enhance performance can paradoxically undermine employee will and ability to work well for the organisation, which hinders the very performance that such endeavours are intended to improve, thereby feeding a self-perpetuating problem for management.*

The enduring nature of the performance management paradox, despite myriad attempts to master it, suggests that it may simply be ‘impervious to resolution’ (Cunha and Putnam, 2019: 100), just one of many ‘persistent and unsolvable puzzles’ in organisation (Smith and

Lewis, 2011: 385). Yet with the evident substantive role that subjective employee experience plays in determining organisational outcomes, it becomes incumbent on management research to develop a fuller understanding of it such that this knowledge can be effectively implemented in concerted efforts to counteract the negative dynamics of the paradox (Lewis, 2000). To this end, the following section of this review turns attention to the relatively underrepresented domain of employee experience to refine an 'egological' lens (Husserl, 1960: 86) that management researchers and practitioners can look through to see the world of work and organisation as do workers situated in theirs.

2.2. The employee experience: an egological view

The employee experience, as a recognised research perspective, is considered to be relatively nascent. Regarding its origins, Batat (2022) and Malik et al. (2023) credit Abhari et al. (2008) with the coining of the term while Panneerselvam and Balaraman (2022) draw attention to Sutton and Griffin's (2004: 494) earlier study of employees' 'post-entry experiences' in relation to their 'pre-entry expectations'. Technically, however, the employee experience is a subject of study that far precedes these authors' direct references to it, albeit perhaps unacknowledged as such. In fact, Sutton and Griffin (2004) themselves demonstrate how Porter and Steers (1973) included a perspective of employee experience in their definition of "met expectations". Porter and Steers' (1973: 152) parsimonious definition refers to 'what a person encounters on the job in the way of positive and negative experiences'.

Yet, far before any of these researchers, it could be argued that Williams (1920) was a – if not *the* – forerunning investigator into the employee experience. His extensive work was perhaps the first of its kind that delved deeply into understanding the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of workers from their own perspectives. This early exploration into the subjective experiences of employees emphasised the importance of sincerely considering the person in the context of their working lives.

The well-known Hawthorn studies that followed shortly after offer another seminal example of research that developed and learnt from a rich knowledge of the experience of not just a worker, *per se*, but a person who works. Between 1928 and 1930, an incredible total of

21,126 employees were interviewed at the Hawthorne Works (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1961: 204). As Sonnenfeld (1985: 113) notes, these interviews were a systematic means of 'directly soliciting the opinions and perceptions of workers', and the understanding among the research interviewers that they were "tapping" the employee experience as the 'source of material' was not lost on them (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1961: 270). In their account originally published in 1939, they describe how the interviews with staff at the Works elicited 'the emotional significance to the worker of particular events and objects in [their] experience' and 'implicit meanings which the worker assigned to the reality about [them]' (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1961: 270)

Arguably, to some relative degree, the employee experience has been a feature of each and every investigation that has solicited the views of employees on their employer, their working circumstances, and/or their work-related well-being. Among myriad, one example is Atkinson and Hall's (2011) interviews with National Health Service (NHS) staff regarding flexible working arrangements and their happiness; another is Mroueh and de Waal's (2020) survey of employees on their organisation's performance and attractiveness along with their sense of work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction. If the raw data of these investigations were not drawn from the experiences of the participating employees, from where could they have originated? So, while some may excitedly claim that employee experience is the 'new paradigm of human resource management' (Itam and Ghosh, 2020: 45) and 'the missing link' for performance (Malik et al., 2023: 98), it is important to recognise that the employee experience has always been "there" for the employee and present in a great proportion of organisational studies, albeit often overlooked by management scholarship and practice in favour of other foci.

2.2.1. Defining the employee experience

With such a surge of enthusiasm from researchers into the concept of the employee experience, in only a short time many definitions of it have sprouted, some of which exhibit problematic aspects. Yadav and Vihari (2023: 329), for example, list six earlier definitions that they used to arrive at theirs: 'the perception created in the minds [sic] of the employee about the workplace through the experiences he/she had at the workplace'. Despite drawing

upon multiple sources, this definition remains somewhat lacking. While employees' perceptions about the workplace are a crucial component of their experience, so too are their 'emotions and feelings' (Joshi et al., 2024: 291). Itam and Ghosh (2020: 41) acknowledge this in their alternative definition of the employee experience as 'the feelings, perceptions and emotions that an employee experiences through their involvement in work and within the organisational environment'. And though this definition travels towards the nebulous and somewhat overlapping distinction between perceptions, emotions, and feelings – insofar as the latter two constitute perceptions – explicitly recognising them as a 'set' (Itam and Ghosh, 2020: 41; Joshi et al., 2024: 291) broadens the scope of experience beyond Yadav and Vihari's (2023) narrow focus on the mind through cognition alone. Recognising emotions and feelings includes in the concept of employee experience the affective element whereby emotions involve bodily and behavioural reactions (Batat, 2022) and feelings account for the raw and elusive conscious component of 'Being-there' in human experience (Heidegger, 1962: 172).

Itam and Ghosh's (2020: 41) more comprehensive definition does, however, exhibit its own problematic element in that it unnecessarily goes on to suggest that the employee's 'set of perceptions, emotions and feelings... provides them with positive reinforcement to develop, engage, contribute and retain within the organization for good'. Evidence certainly suggests that this *can* indeed be the case, but only when experiences are positive (Malik et al., 2023). Antithetical experiences are more likely to produce the opposite effect.

A further, more functional and succinct perspective of Panneerselvam and Balaraman (2022: 202) provides a more balanced view on the potential for an employee's experiences to be either positive or negative by summarising them as 'all that employees encounter, big or small, good or bad, during their tenure in their organisation'. However, while this comprehensive view offers a long-term perspective of the entire life-course of the employment relationship, it lacks the depth of personal poignance that the broader concept of employee experience also attempts to encapsulate (Cornelius et al., 2022).

A final, 'holistic', definition proposed by Batat (2022: 996) may, however, remedy all of the above conceptual drawbacks in the way that it encapsulates employee experience as:

employees' subjective and evolving perceptions of their cognitive, behavioural and emotional state, along with their social interactions among the employing organization and its related social actors... These perceptions are derived from numerous encounters affecting the well-being of employees and their perceived value throughout their experiential journeys within organizations.

Unpacking the various elements of Batat's (2022) interpretation, it first recognises an employee's innate reflexive self-awareness of their momentary thoughts, actions, and feelings, while also attending to their perception (comprehension) of their relative situatedness within an organisation through connections with the people that they encounter while "there". The former reflects the internal dialogue that one has with oneself (introspection), while the latter a continuous correspondence with an enveloping world with others (extrospection). Secondly, Batat's (2022) definition attends to the ever-mutating nature of experience that is subject to change through the flow of time passing and forces of influence beyond one's control. Lastly, it highlights the impact of these experiences on one's overall well-being, which alludes to the important role that employee experience appears to play in the link between management input and performance outcomes in the process of organising (Malik et al., 2023).

2.2.2. Redefining well-being (happiness) from the experiential perspective

As Batat's (2022) holistic definition of employee experience suggests, it is not possible to fully comprehend the employee experience without addressing the all-pervasive element of well-being. Indeed, it is arguably imprudent to overlook the well-being of workers in management theory or practice in general. Even if organisations can take this 'low road' approach to performance and still turn a profit (Guest and Woodrow, 2012: 113; Elkington, 2018), evidence suggests that such organisations are missing out on the additional potential that high states of well-being can give to overall organisational performance (Pecino et al., 2018; Pagán-Castaño et al., 2020).

The embryonic stage of construct definition in the formation of a "new" paradigm such as employee experience (Itam and Ghosh, 2020) provides an opportunity to advance scientific understanding by refining out questionable forms of thinking that have perfused and dominated adjacent realms of study. At the same time, it also presents the threat of not

doing so sufficiently, which may hamper theoretical development. The structure of theories in organisation and management studies often depends on foundations in other research domains, such as (social) psychology and sociology. Yet, as Pfeffer (2014: 457) warns, these domains are themselves ‘not necessarily paragons to be emulated’. Further, with the general tendency of management scholarship not to discuss individual contributions to the broader corpus in great detail, this can lead to the unfortunate entrenchment of flawed and unhelpful ideas through insufficient vetting (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2020).

An instance of this opportunity (and threat of missing it) has presented itself as the focus of scholarship shifts to the employee experience. Specifically, this concerns a confusion that has emerged in the definition of *well-being* and *happiness* in psychology. And while it may seem initially tangential to delve so deeply into this specific contention within the employee experience, the paramount importance of well-being (happiness) from the employee’s personal perspective makes it essential to reexamine for management. Therefore, it is pertinent to illustrate the “morass” that has emerged through the creation of numerous overlapping terms that lead to theories about human experience with arguably little practical or scientific sense (Pfeffer, 2014).

The concepts of well-being and happiness are of great interest to management science, but at the same time are highly philosophical and nebulous. Indeed, each may be considered sufficiently vague to constitute what Alvesson and Sandberg (2020: 1292) call a ‘hegemonic ambiguous big’ concept, or ‘hembig’ for short, which they define as:

a scientific concept characterized by its broad scope and ambiguous meanings, which at the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, through its dominance crowds out other less fashionable concepts or prevents the development of a more precise terminology.

Beginning with just the idea of well-being on its own, in recent decades there have been efforts among scholars in psychology and happiness studies to define it (e.g., Ryan and Deci, 2001; Ryff, 2014). Following this trend, Batat (2022: 1006) includes in their employee experience framework ‘four critical pillars’ of well-being: functional, emotional, hedonic, and eudaimonic. However, categorising well-being in this way is a problematic endeavour that is replete with contractions and inconsistencies that ultimately bring the utility of the exercise itself into question (Kashdan et al., 2008). To illustrate this, Batat (2022: 1006) defines

functional well-being as satisfaction with life or ‘certain more-focused aspects of it’, such as one’s job. Yet, Stephan et al. (2020: 2) suggest that ‘life and job satisfaction... are frequently used measures of general and work-related hedonic well-being’ on the basis that they denote pleasure. To confuse matters further, García-Juan et al. (2020: 6) argue that job satisfaction relates to ‘eudaimonic well-being’ since it refers to people’s ‘feelings about the alliance between their true selves and values, and their job reality’. Further still, satisfaction is something that people feel, which means it also qualifies within Batat’s (2022: 1006) emotional pillar of well-being, as this pillar ‘refers to a person’s feelings or emotional state’. Ultimately, the fact that just job satisfaction – which is also regarded as a core component of happiness at work (HAW, Fisher, 2010) – can be attributed to all four of Batat’s (2022) categories of well-being suggests that these defining lines may be unrealistic depictions of what may be better left as ‘the overall quality of an employee’s experience’ (Pagán-Castaño et al., 2020: 470).

The problem is compounded further when scholars attempt to create distinctions not just *within* well-being, but *between* well-being and happiness. The issue seems to have originated from a series of articles (co-)authored by Ryff (i.e., Ryff, 1989; Ryff and Singer, 2008; Ryff, 2014) and Ryan and Deci’s (2001) popular paper “*On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being*”. According to Google Scholar at the time of writing, these four articles have collectively been cited 56,745 times.

Beginning with the lattermost paper, Ryan and Deci (2001: 145) confusingly position eudaimonia as both ‘true happiness’ and ‘well-being as distinct from happiness per se’ (on the same page). While muddling this distinction, they also misrepresent Aristotle’s original thesis on the highest of human potential (i.e., eudaimonia) through a confusion of the terms hedonia and *hedonism*. In reference to Aristotle’s *The Nicomachean Ethics*, the authors state that Aristotle ‘considered hedonic happiness to be a vulgar ideal, making humans slavish followers of desires’ (Ryan and Deci, 2001: 145). Aristotle did indeed write (rather dehumanising) words to this effect, but not in reference to hedonia (pleasure) itself, but the *pursuit* of it: hedonism. Specifically, he wrote that ‘the generality of men and the most vulgar identify the Good with pleasure, and accordingly... show themselves to be utterly slavish, by preferring what is only a life for cattle’ (Aristotle, 1999: 13, 15). The important point for clarification here is that splitting well-being (or happiness) into categories of

hedonia and eudaimonia, as has become a popular exercise in recent scholarship, is not a valid endeavour, at least not according to Aristotle's thesis upon which the argument is made. At multiple points in *The Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle regards hedonia (pleasure) as a fundamental element of *his interpretation of eudaimonia*. For example, he wrote:

happiness [εὐδαιμονία, eudaimonia] is at once the best, the noblest, and the pleasantest [ἡδιστον, most pleasurable] of things: these qualities are not separated (Aristotle, 1999: 43).

And again we suppose that happiness [εὐδαιμονία, eudaimonia] must contain an element of pleasure [ἡδονήν, hedonia] (Aristotle, 1999: 613).

In Aristotle's personal, moral philosophical perspective of "the good life", eudaimonia was an activity, yet he also believed 'pleasure [ἡδονή, hedonia] perfects the activity' (Aristotle, 1999: 595). Therefore, there is no reasonable dichotomy that can be drawn between the two in the realms of psychology using his thesis. Whether one prefers the term happiness or well-being in the modern English vernacular, supposedly eudaimonic sub-dimensions such as a sense of self-actualisation, purpose in life, meaningfulness, and positive relationships (Maslow, 1971; Ryan and Deci, 2001; Ryff, 2014; Seligman, 2018) are also inherently pleasurable (hedonic). Therefore, it would not be possible to capture feelings of eudaimonia without feelings of hedonia (pleasure): 'these qualities are not separated' (Aristotle, 1999: 43); one comes with the other.

Further, as eudaimonia and hedonia cannot be separated in the subjective experience of them, there presents the issue of how psychological methods of inquiry could access the information needed to distinguish between eudaimonic and hedonic expression. This epistemological limitation can be demonstrated via Schriesheim and Tsui's (1980) survey items used to measure job satisfaction, which many assume to be an expression of hedonia only (e.g., Inceoglu et al., 2018; Lawes et al., 2023; Stephan et al., 2023). Yet, the statements 'I am satisfied with the opportunities which exist in this organization for advancement (promotion)' and 'I am satisfied with the work I do' (Schriesheim and Tsui, 1980) suggest a latent sense of growth and meaning underpinning workers' scores, which are conceived as eudaimonic constructs (Fisher, 2010). Furthermore, questions pertaining to colleagues and superiors often evaluated in these surveys (e.g., Warr et al., 1979) introduce notions of positive relationships (Ryff, 2014) or relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2001) into the equation,

which are further supposed components of eudaimonic well-being theories. Moreover, studies that do not allocate job satisfaction to either the domain of hedonia or eudaimonia find it to be underpinned by feelings of meaningfulness, autonomy (Bredillet et al., 2015), and intrinsic value (Vörös, 2022), all of which are customarily defined as eudaimonic well-being. Therefore, this purportedly hedonic expression naturally contains arguably eudaimonic information. It is perhaps, therefore, more appropriate to equate happiness and well-being and use the words interchangeably (Atkinson and Hall, 2011).

Similarly to Ryan and Deci (2001), Ryff (2014) also misrepresents Aristotle's eudaimonia by drawing a false dichotomy between psychological well-being and happiness. In defining her explicitly eudaimonic theory, she argues that Aristotle claimed that 'the highest of all human goods [eudaimonia] is *not* happiness' (Ryff, 2014: 11). However, this is an inaccurate statement, not least because Aristotle wrote in Greek, but also because it can only be true if happiness is arbitrarily bound to hedonia alone, which it need not and should not be. Relatedly, in an earlier paper, Ryff and Singer (2008: 13-14) reiterate a previous argument in Ryff (1989), asserting that prior conceptions of well-being 'rested on a mistaken translation of ancient texts, specifically Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*' – a claim that, ironically, appears to apply here. This raises the question of whether a psychological theory of well-being should hinge on the implication that experts in translation have erred. Indeed, if the translator of the Harvard Loeb edition of *The Nicomachean Ethics* is to be consulted, Ryff's (1989) original assertion seems both unnecessary and unjustified; upon the first translation of the word eudaimonia as happiness, Rackham (1999: 10) accounts for the interchangeability of terms with the footnote: 'This translation of *εὐδαιμονία* can hardly be avoided, but it would perhaps be more accurately rendered by 'Well-being' or 'Prosperity'.

The central point to be made of this is that the various distinctions that have been established in recent decades between well-being and happiness, and the different dimensions that each may possess, may not be quite as precise or useful as scholars continue to believe (Pfeffer, 2014).

In the holistic experience of a person who works, even semantic distinctions such as Peccei et al.'s (2013: 18) categories of 'happiness well-being' and 'health-related dimensions of well-being' can be seen to be problematic. Of course, the term "happiness well-being" would be considered a conflation from the perspective of Ryan and Deci (2001) and Ryff

(2014). But, even beyond this, with happiness well-being being represented by indices such as *job satisfaction* and *positive* and *negative affect*, and health-related well-being encompassing indices such as *stress* and *anxiety* (Peccei et al., 2013), these conceptual categories exhibit misalignment with the “authentic” experience of being – well or otherwise.

This distortion can be seen by taking the apparently health-related (not happiness) well-being construct of *stress* (Peccei et al., 2013). The perceived stress scale (PSS-10) used to measure this experience asks individuals, among other questions, *in the last month, how often have you...* ‘been upset...’, ‘found that you could not cope...’, and ‘felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?’ (Cohen et al., 1983: 394). Feeling upset, unable to cope, and unable to control important things in life is a strong sign that one is not happy or altogether well. Therefore, stress, in the clinical (i.e., health-related) sense serves as an inverse indicator of happiness well-being, and thus should not be categorically removed from it. The same could be said of Peccei et al.’s (2013) other suggested indicator of health-related well-being: *anxiety*. The anxiety component of Lovibond and Lovibond’s (1995: 339) depression anxiety stress scale (DASS-21) measures the extent to which people have recently ‘experienced breathing difficulty’ and ‘trembling’, and felt they were ‘close to panic’ and ‘scared without any good reason’. If someone is experiencing unexplainable fear, near panic, and worrying physiological symptoms, much akin to stress, anxiety can significantly detract from their overall sense of happiness and well-being. Therefore, anxiety, like stress, serves as an inverse indicator of happiness well-being and should arguably not be categorically separated from it in research.

The purpose of this rather in-depth critical analysis of the approach of recent research into the “hembig” of happiness/well-being is to suggest an alternative approach as interest grows in understanding and learning from the employee experience. This approach simply resists the recent tendency to make superfluous categorical distinctions that inadvertently *increase* the distance between theory *about* living experience and the empirical reality of it. This tendency has already begun in employee experience research, as is evident in Batat’s (2022) categories of functional, emotional, hedonic, and eudaimonic well-being. It can also be seen in Yadav and Vihari’s (2023: 338) separation between ‘well-being’ and ‘vigour’ in their measurement scale of employee experience, despite vigour being considered a

component of work engagement (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2022), which, in turn, has been regarded as a component of both eudaimonic well-being (Grant and McGhee, 2021) and HAW (Fisher, 2010). Resisting this tendency may improve the ability of management research to generate more authentic theoretical insight and offer less abstracted, ‘actionable’, advice for practitioners (Pfeffer, 2014: 459, 461).

In raw conscious experience, individuals perceive their well-being as a holistic, amorphous, and interrelated experience where scholars’ recent categorical distinctions do not seem to hold up. Thus, repeat assertions that these aspects of human experience are attributable to “category A” rather than “category B” can have the inadvertent effect of distorting the complex, dynamic reality of how well-being/happiness is experienced and expressed by individuals (Edgar et al., 2015). From the egological view of the employee situated in their experience of their unique personhood, well-being is arguably an all-pervasive and all-encompassing sense of *all being well*, which equates to an uncomplicated definition of happiness (Atkinson and Hall, 2011).

2.3. Situating the employee experience in the performance management paradox: a matter of positive and negative potential

Returning to the broader context of the performance management paradox with an enriched understanding of how an employee’s sense of themselves in the world (of work) determines the quality of their experience, it becomes clearer how this experience may influence the dynamics of the organisation for better or worse (Lewis, 2000). Employees are not inert; they are active participants in their lives, and as part of this their work, job, and organisation (Fisher, 2010). From the experiential perspective, well-being can be seen as both an outcome and a driver of interaction (Batat, 2022). This suggests that, on a continuous basis, the well-being impact of an employee’s interactions within the organisation, in turn, influences their subsequent interactions with it. Through this process multiplied across a workforce, the dynamic condition of the organisation is produced (Tsoukas, 2017). In a way, every employee is an actor and reactor, with the potential for their actions and reactions to be conducive or counter to organisational performance.

This provides a rationale for deepening understanding of the employee experience, in the hope that such insights may enable managers to improve it for the benefit of both people and performance. Indeed, calls to study the employee experience for this very purpose can be traced back as far as the performance management paradox itself. For example, in her concluding remarks on the mutual inability of employees and employers to maintain amicable relations, Addams (1902: 177) suggests that tensions may be resolvable through sincere and caring efforts ‘to know of the lives of our contemporaries’, and to use this knowledge to reach common ground for more productive collaboration. Similarly, from his time at the coal face (literally and figuratively), Williams (1920) saw that the solution to resolving tensions in organisational relations lies firmly in understanding the living experiences of people at the heart of our organisational processes. A primary recommendation from his time with workers in coal mines, railroad shops, shipyards, and oil refineries in Europe and North, Central, and South America was that the ‘art of industry’ that is management needed a deeper consideration of ‘the organized emotion of its human factors and forces’, such that they may be ‘applied in ways which will at one and the same time meet most effectively the needs of... both the performers and the receivers of services’ (Williams, 1920: 317). Staw (1986), expressed a similar viewpoint in his happy/productive worker thesis. In true paradox tradition, though he accepted that this “holy grail” of Human Resources (HR) might be unattainable due to unavoidable conflict, still he believed that simultaneous work-related happiness and productivity ‘might be achieved if we greatly increase our knowledge of work attitudes and behaviours’ (Staw, 1986: 40).

This deeper consideration of “human factors and forces” may prove crucial to gaining a greater understanding of potential ways to alleviate tensions in modern employment relations and thereby prime conditions that capitalise on the complementary and interdependent interests of an organisation’s people and performance. The mere fact that this paradoxical *problématique* remains at the core of organisations after more than a century of study strongly suggests that the field of management still has much to learn if it is to guide organisational practices towards more favourable outcomes for organisations and the people who make (or break) them. In line with the calls of Addams (1902), Williams (1920), and Staw (1986), management that better recognises the employee experience may be able to unleash more of their people’s potential into the organisation.

As an illustrative example of this, there has been a growing interest in recent years in the psychological capital of employees, due to its evidenced positive association with performance (Luthans et al., 2007; Avey et al., 2011). This interest has led to the development of web- and app-based interventions designed to raise the personal “HERO” faculties of hope, (self-)efficacy, resilience, and optimism among workers such that they may thrive in their roles (Luthans et al., 2008; Avey et al., 2023). Although there is nothing inherently wrong with such individualistic interventions so long as they are received well, evidence suggests they may also simply be unnecessary in organisations that naturally cultivate these sought-after dimensions of well-being (and performance) through daily employee experiences. For instance, Kim et al. (2019a) found that psychological capital was higher in employees who experienced their work as meaningful and their organisation as supportive. While the authors did not measure performance in their investigation, it follows that more positive states of well-being (such as HERO) acquired through positive organisational experiences (e.g., meaning and support) would have a correspondingly favourable effect upon performance consistent with the results of individualistic intervention studies (Luthans et al., 2007; Avey et al., 2011).

Furthermore, positive perceptions such as meaningfulness and supportiveness experienced by employees in such organisational contexts implies also the absence of negative experiences that could generate abient reactions, such as disengagement and withdrawal from the organisation. Research into negative employee experiences, such as abusive supervision and mistreatment by colleagues, alludes to the sequence of deleterious impact that unfavourable experiences can have on the people and performance of an organisation. For example, Ng et al. (2023) found that the more an employee subjectively felt that their supervisor belittled them or that their colleagues insulted them or withheld important work-related information, the less satisfied they were with their jobs and the less enthused and motivated they felt about their work. Similarly, Khan et al. (2022) found that when employees perceived abusive supervision, this was positively associated with their self-reported feelings of anger and supervisor-rated withdrawal, while negatively associated with their supervisor’s rating of their organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). These investigations into both the positive and negative potential of the employee experience suggest that it is a ‘dominant process’ through which more positive or negative performance

outcomes occur (Schad and Bansal, 2018: 1500). This evidence emphasises the need for organisations to reflect on what factors in the holistic employee experience promote positive perceptions in order to safeguard organisational performance.

Learning from employee experience may be a powerful pragmatic means for management to understand how best to achieve this in practice. As organisations ‘are continuously changing, continuously being produced and renewed by member activities’ (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989: 564), studying the personal experiences of these producers of the organisation could reveal important detail about the micro-foundations upon which the performance management paradox stands (Waldman et al., 2019).

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that there are variables beyond the control of management and employees that also influence the dynamics of paradox (Schad and Bansal, 2018). A sudden economic downturn or major market disruption, for example, could bring on a sudden scarcity of financial resources for a given organisation (Smith and Lewis, 2011), which could increase the pressure for layoffs (Gathmann et al., 2020), pay freezes (Yoon and Sengupta, 2023), and/or unpaid overtime (Chung and Van Der Horst, 2020). Such circumstances are reminders that organisations in general operate amid latent and inescapable ‘profitability-people tensions’ (Glover et al., 2023: 602), which can develop into ‘vicious cycles’ as employees react negatively to their worsening working experiences (Lewis and Smith, 2014: 133). A ‘paradox mindset’ (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018: 30) accepts the inherency of such forces beyond control in complex, “knotted” systems of interaction (Sheep et al., 2017). Nevertheless, delving into the experiential world of the employees entangled with – and thus for their part producing – the system (Archer, 1982) could still provide valuable insights into what propels some companies towards superior outcomes for people and performance despite the disruptive potential of external pressures.

2.4. Chapter summary

Through an extensive review of literature regarding both performance management and the employee experience, this chapter has revealed how performance management is fundamentally entangled with the lived experience of employees. While the pursuit of performance enhancement remains a core managerial ambition, research spanning more

than a century indicates that adverse employee experiences of attempts to enhance performance can produce counterproductive outcomes. This raises a critical question about how managers can reconcile these competing demands for the sake of both employees and organisations.

Building on this, the chapter then examined the recent conceptual evolution of the employee experience, establishing its relevance as both an overlooked dimension of the performance management paradox and as a potential lever for unlocking better outcomes for people and performance. This part of the review developed a holistic, egological perspective, arguing that subjective well-being is not a discrete or compartmentalisable phenomenon, but instead an integrated perception of all being well within one's world (of work). The critical evaluation also addressed the entwined problematic tendency in psychological scholarship to separate happiness and well-being, cautioning against the unscrutinised osmosis of this conceptual practice in employee experience research.

This chapter suggests that organisational dynamics are significantly influenced by the subjective employee experience, with well-being appearing as both an outcome and a driver of employee-organisation interaction (Batat, 2022). This perspective beckons further investigation into how management can intentionally prime organisational conditions to optimise the employee experience, and what organisations stand to gain through this. These theoretical considerations now segue into the following chapter, which extends this line of inquiry by reviewing literature on how management can realise mutual gains for people and performance, while also questioning how often they are realised in practice.

Chapter 3. Literature review B – Mutual gains? That’s easy! (in theory): exploring the mismatch between management ideology and employee reality

The essential principle of mutual gains pertains to a ‘win-win scenario’ (Loon et al., 2019: 165). In the context of people and performance management, this is where both an employee and their organisation benefit. Thinking idealistically, this would amount to ‘maximum prosperity for the employer, coupled with maximum prosperity for the employé’ (Taylor, 1919: 9-10), optimally happy/productive workers (Staw, 1986), *the* optimal scenario for people and performance. This integrative review chapter surrounds a systematically obtained set of studies reporting mutual gains. Such studies are of particular interest to this investigation because they essentially indicate a “collapse” of the performance management paradox – a way to relieve the tension.

The review begins by looking optimistically into the literature that boasts a plethora of ways to achieve mutual gains. Studies showing a variety of human resource management (HRM) best practices – spanning employee recruitment, development, involvement, and motivation – suggest that these are crucial components of an employee experience that leads to wins for personal well-being and organisational performance. Further studies highlight how vital the line-manager is for realising these ideals; not only do they serve as a conduit of HRM practices, but their close dyadic relationship with employees is a source of substantial influence over personal and organisational outcomes. Finally, additional studies that more broadly attend to employee perceptions of general management and organisational conduct indicate that an employee’s prevailing perceptions of the organisation, such as the perceived ethicality of management throughout the ranks or the overall virtuous conduct of their company, are strong predictors of their organisational performance alignment.

This evidence supports the development of a parsimonious experiential model of management-employee-organisation (MEO) interaction that suggests that an employee’s subjective experience of management activity influences their overarching perception of the organisation and their personal orientation towards it. This nomological model essentially

shows the paradoxical potential of the employee experience for organisational performance, based on the subjective perception of interactions with and within the organisation.

Following this, the review adopts a more critical perspective, which focuses on how the same studies that show how important (and seemingly easy) it is to attain mutual gains also show that employees' perceptions of management conduct are, on average, far from ideal. This suggests that the full potential for productivity through people is seldom being realised (Peters and Waterman, 1982). Accordingly, despite abundant research on HRM practices, leadership "styles", and general management, the question of how managers can simultaneously serve their organisation's people and performance warrants further investigation, as it is evidently often not being achieved.

The critical perspective further suggests that the dominant research approach of simply correlating "good" with "good" lacks the openness and neutrality to appropriately capture the employee experience, and therefore, access the bounty of insight it waits to offer (Alvesson, 2020). The chapter closes with three research questions that guide a much-needed exploratory mixed methods investigation into what may be learned from the employee experience to guide managers through the performance management paradox.

3.1. Literature search and refinement process

An integrative review approach was adopted to review the extant literature on the subject of people and performance management amid paradox. An integrative review is designed to produce novel perspectives or points of view for further empirical exploration (Elsbach and van Knippenberg, 2020). In line with this approach, the central aim of this review was to synthesise new knowledge on a mature research problem and provoke fresh questions (Torraco, 2016) that may aid management to overcome the paradoxical tension between the demands of their organisation's people and performance. A broad view of the domain of management was taken to consider a host of organisational factors that previous research has found to influence well-being outcomes for employees and performance-related outcomes for organisations.

Literature was collated via the comprehensive and commonly used databases of Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) (Loon et al., 2019). A timeframe was set between 1986 and 2023 to

capture relevant research since the commentaries of Staw (1986) and Sloan (1987) which highlighted the research problem in ways that would be just as fitting today as then. To explore a variety of research streams and researcher perspectives on this mature topic, a broad focus was applied to the initial literature search strategy (Torraco, 2016). The purpose of this was to develop a matrix of search terms to generate results within the scholarly databases. While a variety of papers were reviewed at this non-committal reading stage, all search terms were present in the combination of four contributions that had considered the potential for mutual gains (Staw, 1986; Sloan, 1987; Loon et al., 2019; Pagán-Castaño et al., 2020). The search terms are presented in Table 3.1 relative to their presence in the abovementioned studies. They are also presented in Table 3.2 in their search query form with Boolean functions.

Table 3.1. Literature search terms

	Well-being	Wellbeing	Wellness	Happi*	Happy	Employee*	Work*	Productiv*	Performance	Organ*ation*	Employer*	Promot*	Program*	Intervention*	Initiative*	Policy	Policies
Loon et al. (2019)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Pagán-Castaño et al. (2020)	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x					x
Sloan (1987)			x			x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x
Staw (1986)				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x			x	

To ensure rigour, papers were limited to empirical investigations published in journals with a Chartered Institute of Business Schools (CABS) Academic Journal Guide (AJG) 2021 Quality Rating of 2 to 4* (CABS, 2021). The underpinning rationale for this is that '[m]any excellent practitioner-oriented articles are published in 2-rated journals', and these are 'fully refereed according to accepted standards and conventions' (CABS, 2021: 12). This therefore provided a reputable minimum standard for the corpus of evidence upon which this review stands. To focus the search on the theme of people *and* performance management, results were limited to papers published within the 109 2-4* journals in the AJG Subject Areas of General Management, Ethics, and Gender and Social Responsibility; Human Resource Management and Employment Studies; and Management Development and Education (CABS, 2021: 16).

This stepwise search and refinement process is presented in Table 3.2 and the distribution of methodological approaches among the final set of articles is shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.2. Core literature search and refinement process

Step	Further detail	Yield	
		Scopus	WoS
Search query:	((("employee*" NEAR/5 "well-being") OR ("employee*" NEAR/5 "wellbeing") OR ("employee*" NEAR/5 "wellness") OR ("employee" NEAR/5 "happi*") OR ("employee" NEAR/5 "happy") OR ("work*" NEAR/5 "well-being") OR ("work*" NEAR/5 "wellbeing") OR ("work*" NEAR/5 "wellness") OR ("work*" NEAR/5 "happi*") OR ("work*" NEAR/5 "happy")) AND ("Productiv*" OR "Performance") AND ("Organi*ation*" OR "Employer*") AND (("Promot*") OR ("Program*") OR ("Interven*") OR ("Initiative*") OR ("Policy") OR ("Policies"))	6897	1783
Data limits:	Date range: 1986-2023 Fields: Business Economics (WoS); Business, Management and Accounting (Scopus) Languages: English, Spanish, and Portuguese Document type: Articles	711	596
Refine to:	AJG 2-4* Journal Rating	482	279
Merged set		761	
Duplicates removed		759	
Refine to:	AJG Subject Areas of General Management, Ethics, and Gender and Social Responsibility; Human Resource Management and Employment Studies; and Management Development and Education	293	
Abstract review:	According to inclusion criteria: 1. empirical investigation 2. reporting people and performance benefits 3. stemming from perceived managerial activity		
Final number of core articles for analysis and synthesis		29	

Table 3.3. Distribution of reviewed empirical paper methodologies

Methodology	Distribution
Quantitative (survey-based)	27 (93.10%)
Qualitative (interview-based)	2 (6.90%)
Total	29 (100%)

As shown in Table 3.2 above, a staged review approach was taken (Torraco, 2005), consisting of an initial search of titles, abstracts, and keywords for selection according to relevancy, followed by an in-depth analysis of contributions that met the qualitative inclusion criteria of reported beneficial outcomes for employees and their organisations stemming from perceived managerial and organisational activity (Snyder, 2019). The following section presents the review of these systematically obtained studies, while a literature review table is provided in Appendix A.

3.2. Employee experiences of management leading to mutual gains

The reviewed literature conclusively suggests that mutual gains for employees and organisations are attainable. However, the potential for these outcomes appears heavily contingent on the perception of the employee, which reinforces the pivotal role of the employee experience in the attainment of desirable outcomes for employing organisations (as established in the previous chapter). The evidence for this is set out in the following three sections, which are structured according to the dominant organisational antecedents examined in respective studies, namely HRM practices, direct line-managers (immediate supervisors)², and general management and organisational conduct.

For the purpose of evidencing mutual gains, study outcomes were sorted by their primary relevance to employee well-being or organisational performance. However, it should be noted that the reality is not quite so categorical, nor are the boundaries of either category easy to define. To provide an example of this logic, job satisfaction was considered “more” relevant to employee well-being, while OCB was regarded as “more” relevant to

² Henceforth referred to as line-managers, unless replicating the chosen terminology of a cited source.

organisational performance. Yet, while job satisfaction is a central aspect of an employee's HAW (Fisher, 2010), it has also been shown to be a significant predictor of organisational performance (Edmans, 2012). Equally, as OCB contributes 'to the maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that supports task performance' (Organ, 1997: 91), it is believed to comprise behaviour that 'promotes the effective functioning of the organization' (Organ, 1988: 4); at the same time, OCB also appears indicative of employee happiness through declarations such as 'I willingly give my time to help others who have work-related problems' and 'I show pride when representing the organisation in public' (Mohammad et al., 2019: 635). As these nuanced intersections only serve to reinforce the connection between employee experience and organisational performance, the somewhat arbitrary dichotomisation was considered an innocuous sorting device. The next section considers employee experiences of human resource management (HRM) practices that demonstrate the influence that employee perceptions of various HRM practices have on well-being and performance outcomes.

3.2.1. Experience of HRM practices

An extensively researched area within the obtained literature was that of HRM practices. In some studies, these comprised a comprehensive set of practices (e.g., Huang and He, 2022), sometimes considered as formal systems such as high-performance work systems (HPWS) (e.g., Jo et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2023) or high-involvement work systems (HIWS) (Salas-Vallina et al., 2020). Other studies considered HRM practices addressing more specific issues such as violence in the workplace (Shao et al., 2023), work-family balance (Medina-Garrido et al., 2021), flexible working (Atkinson and Hall, 2011), and digital onboarding (Sani et al., 2023). The implementation of such formal measures, which ultimately seek to improve performance in organisations, has previously been considered for its potential to paradoxically weaken it (Loon et al., 2019). The evidence in this review strongly suggests that this is not an issue with the HRM systems, but with the perceived quality and extent of their implementation by employees.

For example, based on their earlier work with colleagues, which developed a 31-item questionnaire scale regarding 'HRM content' (Katou et al., 2020: 783), Katou (2022) found

that respondents' *disagreement* that their organisation had appropriate systems in place for staffing, training and development, compensation, performance appraisals, and communication and participation was associated with a greater sense of exploitation and a lesser sense of well-being. In turn, these negative perceptions coincided with diminished motivation, organisational commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), engagement, and perception of their organisation's performance (Katou, 2022). Ultimately, this evidence suggests that it is not HPWS that have unintended deleterious effects upon on performance via diminished well-being. Rather, it is an employee's perceived deficiency in these core HRM dimensions that acts as the determining factor. In further support of this, Katou's (2022) survey-based model revealed that respondents' *agreement* that their organisation had appropriate systems in place for the five abovementioned dimensions corresponded with a greater sense of well-being and a lesser sense of exploitation, which thereby conveyed positive effects of the existence of HPWS into the performance-related outcomes.

Other studies corroborate Katou's (2022) findings, showing the vast array of potentially obtainable benefits for people and performance stemming from well-received HRM practices. For instance, Huang and He (2022) found positive perspectives regarding a broad set of HRM practices (resembling HPWS) to be associated with a sense of belonging within their organisation and, akin to Katou (2022), self-reported OCB. Further, evidence reported by Medina-Garrido et al. (2021) regarding work-family policies suggests that successful HRM systems from a performance perspective cannot be designed without the holism of personal well-being in mind. The authors' model revealed that the existence of work-family policies only explained variance in employee commitment, motivation, and (self-reported) performance via indicators of well-being such as job satisfaction, nervousness, and stress (Medina-Garrido et al., 2021). It follows, therefore, that while organisations should always be attentive to the possibility that poorly implemented HRM measures will increase the likelihood of unintended effects being observed (Loon et al., 2019), nevertheless, it must be considered that a fundamental lack of such measures may produce equally or more undesirable outcomes.

The study designs of Snape and Redman (2010) and Beltran-Martin et al. (2023) support this finding in objective terms. As opposed to the more common practice of collecting employee

perceptions about their respective organisation's HRM practices (e.g., Salas-Vallina et al., 2023), Snape and Redman (2010) and Beltran-Martin et al. (2023) instead examined the association between the *extent* of HRM measures as reported by human resource (HR) managers and a variety of well-being- and performance-related outcomes. Their studies share complementary findings. Firstly, Snape and Redman (2010) found a greater reported *extent of* management systems pertaining to recruitment, development, motivation, and involvement of employees to be associated with a greater sense of organisational support, perceived job influence, and self-reported OCB (altruism and compliance) among employees. Similarly, Beltran-Martin et al. (2023) found the reported *extent of* human capital practices (e.g., structured onboarding, development support, and formal evaluation), motivational practices (e.g., performance rewards in terms of pay and promotion), and participatory practices (e.g., comprehensive communication channels for complaints, organisational development, cross-departmental dialogue, and company performance information transmission) to positively relate to employees' feelings of calmness, control, safety, and meaningfulness in work, which in turn positively related to their work engagement. This evidence of objective associations between the provision of HRM measures such as HPWS and positive outcomes for employees and the organisation suggest that they are better to have in place than not for both parties. Yet, it is important to recognise the power of the subjective interpretation of the employee in the emergence of these desirable outcomes (Kilroy et al., 2023).

The central role that perception plays in the attainment of mutual gains for an organisation's people and performance is reinforced by several studies which show that these outcomes are significantly influenced by employee perspectives of an array of HRM practices. For instance, Salas-Vallina et al. (2023) observed that employees who perceive their organisation as systematically promoting personal development and inclusion in communication and decision-making also report a greater sense of personal resilience and lower perceived demands, alongside reduced indications of burnout and a stronger perception of personal performance. Similarly, Salas-Vallina et al. (2020) found that employee perceptions of branch-level work systems – specifically pertaining to flexible job design, training, team autonomy (e.g., self-direction and problem solving), information sharing, and equitable gains sharing – were positively associated with job satisfaction, work engagement, organisational

commitment, and impressions of organisational performance. Moreover, investigations examining specific aspects of HRM, such as anti-violence protocols or work-family policies suggest that a favourable regard for such measures coincides with more positive emotions, higher job satisfaction, and greater work, career, and organisational commitment (Medina-Garrido et al., 2021; Shao et al., 2023). While these various studies differ in their antecedent HRM foci, they report similar outcomes and converge on a common source – the employee experience – for their data and reported effects.

A key consideration here is the importance of not just the formal implementation of HRM initiatives in isolation, but also how (if at all) they come across to employees in their daily lives. As noted by Katou (2022: 1043), HR systems can only be expected to yield high-performance when they are embedded within a ‘culture that supports employee experiences’. This assertion is supported by the study of Medina-Garrido et al. (2021), which demonstrated that beneficial outcomes for people and performance were related to both the recognised *existence* and perceived *accessibility* of HRM measures designed to promote work-family balance. Crucially, what this suggests is that the relevant HRM policy must first *exist* for it to be at all accessible (e.g., having the schedule flexibility to manage personal and family responsibilities), but its perceived *accessibility* is in part determined by an employee’s personal understanding that their supervisor and colleagues would support them engaging with it, and that they would not suffer career-related consequences for doing so (Medina-Garrido et al., 2021).

The particularly important role of line-managers in the employee experience of HRM was a notable finding in several of the reviewed investigations. For example, Kilroy et al. (2023) observed that frontline managers were integral in conveying supervisory and organisational support to their subordinates through the extent to which they were seen to enact existing HR policies. As these impressions associated with self-reported commitment and OCB among respondents (Kilroy et al., 2023), it appears that while managers require effective HRM systems to implement, effective HRM systems need effective managers to implement them. The investigation of Van Woerkom and Meyers (2015) also highlights the acute importance of line-management in HRM. While their study assessed employees’ perceptions of the extent to which their organisation appreciated and provided opportunities to identify and apply their strengths, this included their perception of the dialogue that they had with

their manager regarding their personal development (Van Woerkom and Meyers, 2015). Similarly to Kilroy et al. (2023), Van Woerkom and Meyers (2015) found that perceptions of HRM involving line-management positively related to self-reported OCB, as well as in-role performance and innovativeness, all of which were mediated by positive affect (e.g., interest and excitement).

Additional evidence of the central role that line-managers play in determining employees' experiences of HRM practices can be seen in studies that openly consulted employees and managers alike on the topic. When considering an employee's early and evolving impressions of their organisation through its onboarding process, Sani et al. (2023) found consistent views among employees and managers that in the modern world of digital onboarding it is important to ensure that the relative lack of human interaction does not translate into a lack of employee integration into the organisation. Their findings suggest that a more removed professional relationship between a new recruit and their coworkers, HR representatives, and their line-manager could result in dwindling social connections and personal well-being, a reduced sense of meaning in their work, and ultimately poorer employee relations (Sani et al., 2023). Similarly, interviews conducted by Atkinson and Hall (2011) with employees and managers of an NHS Trust on the matter of flexible working elicited a shared view among them that flexible working was mutually valuable for the daily lives of the staff and the daily functioning of the organisation. The managers and employees appeared to share the overarching sentiment that this HRM practice relied upon a 'give and take' ethic of reciprocity, whereby the discretionary support of managers gave employees a greater sense of control, reduced stress, and the inherent desire to flex for coworkers and the organisation in return (Atkinson and Hall, 2011: 98).

These findings suggest that formal HRM measures serve as a fundamental structure from which employees and the organisation *can* tandemly benefit, but that line-managers are an integral part of their implementation, and thus the likelihood that these mutual gains are obtained. This points to HRM policy presence alone being insufficient without effective managerial endorsement (Medina-Garrido et al., 2021). In line with this, the next section turns attention to the role that an employee's experience of their direct line-management has upon personal and performance outcomes.

3.2.2. Experience of direct line-management

The impact of employee perceptions of their line-managers was the most frequently researched topic in the acquired literature. These studies covered various attributes and actions of managers that allude to mutual gains for employees and their organisations. For instance, Samad et al. (2022) found that line-managers being perceived as *role models* was associated with lower employee turnover intention, partially explained by higher general well-being and job satisfaction. Similarly, Stempel et al. (2022) found role model line-managers to be positively linked to their subordinate's self-reported performance via a lesser impression of work-family conflict.

The apparent *inclusive* nature of line-managers is another seemingly mutually beneficial trait. Javed et al. (2019) found that an employee's impression of their manager's openness, availability, and accessibility positively associated with both their sense of psychological safety and their manager's assessment of their innovative behaviour. In such instances, it seems that employees benefit from an impression that their organisation fosters creative problem solving and diverse thinking (Edmondson, 1999), while their organisation benefits from the resultant generation, promotion, and realisation of new ideas (Scott and Bruce, 1994; Javed et al., 2019).

Other comprehensive impressions of line-managers' character, such as being *responsible*, *engaging*, *ethical*, *authentic*, and *servant* were associated with an array of positive outcomes for employees. For example, when employees recognised these admirable qualities in their manager, they felt more trust in and satisfaction with them, a deeper feeling of belonging in the organisation (Yang and Wei, 2017; Akhtar et al., 2020), higher job satisfaction, better resource-to-demands balance, and lower burnout (Schaufeli, 2015; Keltainen and Hakanen, 2022). These managerial attributes associated also with multiple beneficial outcomes for the organisation through greater expressed engagement, commitment, OCB, and ethical intentionality, as well as self- and supervisor-rated performance (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Schaufeli, 2015; Yang and Wei, 2017; Akhtar et al., 2020).

Until this point, the terms "leader" and "leadership" have been intentionally avoided, but they are required for the following analysis. The reason for refraining from adopting these terms is because many studies position themselves as investigating "leadership" when this

may be somewhat misleading. As Alvesson (2020: 5) contends, there is a tendency in the domain of leadership studies to categorise assumptively ‘all supervisors and managers as leaders doing leadership’. This appears to be the case in all but one investigation in the obtained collection of research reports (i.e., Kim and Park, 2019) – which notably did not refer to line-managers or immediate supervisors. It would be more accurate, therefore, to specify that the other leadership studies were studying employee perceptions of qualities consistent with leaders, as exhibited by line-managers.

When examining the various leadership qualities assayed across investigations, many actions appear consistent, which brings into question the relevance of their distinction in the experiential perspective of the employee, and therefore the utility of the distinction itself (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). For instance, actions that define the character of a *transformational* leader include: expressing their important values and beliefs, considering the moral and ethical consequences of decisions, and examining critical assumptions to query their appropriateness (Avolio and Bass, 2004; Samad et al., 2022). These moral activities chime with various attributes of an *ethical* leader, who is seen to make fair and balanced decisions by considering what is “right”, discuss business ethics or values with employees, set an ethical example of how work should be done, and define success not just by results but by the way that they are obtained (Brown et al., 2005; Yang and Wei, 2017). These activities overlap also with those of an *authentic* leader, whose moral character depends upon their beliefs appearing congruent with their actions (Walumbwa et al., 2008), and a *servant* leader, who is seen to express their true feelings to their staff (Kaltiainen and Hakanen, 2022). Collectively, these actions of moral fortitude across purportedly distinct styles of leadership exhibited by line-managers contribute to higher levels of employee satisfaction with their job and manager, lower burnout and turnover intention, a greater sense of organisational identity and work engagement, and better self- and supervisor-rated performance (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Yang and Wei, 2017; Kaltiainen and Hakanen, 2022; Samad et al., 2022).

Furthermore, beyond these perceived moral actions that benefit people and performance, the extent to which employees perceived their line-managers to connect people and connect *with* people also featured in multiple investigations. For instance, the abovementioned *inclusive* managers were seen to be open to hearing new ideas and

customarily partaking in discussions regarding alternative ways to achieve goals, create opportunities, and improve work processes (Carmeli et al., 2010; Javed et al., 2019). Such inclusive qualities of openness and engagement are also reflected in various other leadership concepts. For instance, managers exhibiting *ethicality* are regarded as those who listen to what employees have to say (Yang and Wei, 2017), while managers demonstrating *authenticity* solicit and consider multiple viewpoints (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Moreover, *responsible* managers are those who involve all relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes, and facilitate open and rational discussions among them (Akhtar et al., 2020), while *transformational* managers seek differing perspectives when solving problems, meaningfully involving themselves in the process by proposing novel ways to view issues and overcome them (Avolio and Bass, 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2008; Samad et al., 2022). In essence, these studies suggest that line-managers who are seen to sincerely care cultivate a greater perception of organisational and supervisory support among employees, which in turn seems to benefit the organisation through outcomes such as greater organisational commitment, pride, loyalty, and OCB (Schaufeli, 2015; Kilroy et al., 2023).

Overall, the literature focusing on line-managers demonstrates the significance of an employee's perception of their own. The links between perceived positive actions and characteristics in line-managers brings into question the various purported distinctions between leadership "styles"; their similar descriptive features and impacts upon employee well-being and performance-related variables suggests that such styles are essentially describing 'upbeat leadership' (Alvesson, 2020: 3). Ritzenhöfer et al.'s (2019) investigation is a notable example of this. The authors confirmed that an employee's sense that their line-manager was grateful, thankful, appreciative, and obliged associated with greater OCB towards, and lesser intention to leave, both their manager and the organisation. It is certainly reassuring – but perhaps not particularly surprising – that common courtesy within professional human interaction begets favourable responses from the recipients of it. With this critique aside, considered collectively, the wealth of presented investigations strongly demonstrates the substantial influence that line-managers have on performance-related outcomes through their impact upon the daily working lives of employees.

However, as important as a line-manager may be in shaping an employee's experience of their time in a given organisation, they are not the be-all and end-all of the employee

experience. *No manager is an island*, as it were. Accordingly, the next section turns attention to studies that suggest that an employee's broader perceptions of general management and organisational action also influence personal and performance-related outcomes.

3.2.3. Experience of general management and organisational conduct

Beyond the literature examining HRM practices and line-managers specifically, a smaller selection of studies centred on employee's perceptions of the general management of their organisation. These studies demonstrate that employees' impressions of senior management and general activity within their organisation are associated with important outcomes for the organisation via the employee experience. For example, Mroueh and de Waal (2020) found that employees' ratings of their organisation according to an internal high-performance organisation (HPO) diagnostic were significantly associated with their self-reported work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction, along with their impression of their organisation's attractiveness. By harnessing employee perspectives, the HPO scale is designed to help organisations evaluate their internal strengths and weaknesses in areas such as management quality, long-term orientation, and continuous improvement (de Waal, 2012a). And while Mroueh and de Waal's (2020) study was conducted in a single organisation in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), its findings reaffirm those of a prior study of multiple organisations in the Netherlands, which included all of the abovementioned variables except job satisfaction (de Waal, 2018). The consistency of results across cultural contexts between these two studies suggests that the aggregate of individual employee experiences can serve as an insightful metric for assessing not just organisational performance (de Waal, 2012a) but also the extent of workforce engagement and commitment.

Further to Mroueh and de Waal's (2020) focus on the employee experience of organisational performance, other studies considering broader managerial conduct emphasise the importance of employees' perceptions of ethicality or virtuousness in management. For instance, Mozumder (2018) applied the same survey instrument as Yang and Wei (2017), developed by Brown et al. (2005), to measure the perceived ethicality of not only immediate supervisors but also top and middle management. The results suggest that employees

compare management throughout the ranks to a consistent standard of 'normatively appropriate conduct' based on perceived 'personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making' (Brown et al., 2005: 120). Mozumder's (2018) findings imply that employees' perceptions of managers at all levels acting appropriately and with employees' interests in mind influence their trust in management, sense of well-being at work, perception of how colleagues treat one another, and sense of the organisation's performance.

It is important to note with studies that gather an employee's perceptions of their management and organisation (e.g., Mozumder, 2018; Mroueh and de Waal, 2020) that a subjective view of how a company is performing is not necessarily the same as the company's *actual* performance. Yet, research has shown that subjective performance measures align well with objective ones (Wall et al., 2004; Singh et al., 2016), which suggests that subjective measures can indeed serve as useful indicators of organisational performance to a degree. Consistent observations of positive correlations between employee perceived organisational performance and variables such as expressed engagement and commitment (e.g., Mroueh and de Waal, 2020) offer a subtle yet salient sign of how the personal experiences of an organisation's performers with and within it influence its performance on an ongoing basis. These associations signify that this influence manifests through the extent of their self-investment in their work and the organisation for whom they work (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989).

Further studies suggest that this general experience of management and the organisation overall can be measured at a fundamental human value level. Akin to impressions of managerial ethicality (Mozumder, 2018), fairness in organisational-level conduct was another important determining perception in investigations reporting dually positive outcomes for organisations and their employees. For example, Mohammad et al. (2019) found that employees' perceptions of being treated fairly by their organisation positively related to a sense of ownership of the organisation and self-reported OCB. Similarly, Ambrose et al. (2021) found that employees' sense of justice within their department was significantly related to stronger impressions of colleagues acting fairly, which in turn were

associated with higher supervisor ratings of their workgroup's OCB, cooperation, and performance.

Additionally, employees' perceptions of their organisation's overall virtuous character formed by collective organisation action have been found to be positively related to self-reported work engagement, partially mediated by general happiness (Singh et al., 2018), and supervisor-rated OCB, partially mediated by affective well-being (Rego et al., 2010). While these investigations stray from direct evaluations of management, their results suggest that an organisation takes on the accumulated, perceived character of the individuals with whom the employees interact, and that such perceived attributes coincide with their well-being at work and in-role and extra-role performance.

Indeed, witnessing ethical conduct across an organisation appears to be a significant matter for employees, and, by virtue of this, the organisation itself. For example, by applying Singhapakdi and Vitell's (2007) ethics institutionalisation scale to assess the extent to which employees perceived ethical behaviour to be in the very fabric of their organisation, Lee et al. (2018) found that perceptions of ethical activities of general management (e.g., accepting responsibility for unethical and illegal organisational activity and holding employees accountable for questionable actions in all instances), along with the overall conduct of those comprising 'my organization' (p. 870), accounted for higher levels of job satisfaction, commitment, perceived quality of work life, and sense of team spirit (*esprit de corps*). While none of these variables are direct measures of organisational performance, it is difficult to imagine an organisation receiving the full potential of their people's human resources while they experience dissatisfaction with their work life, poor team cohesion, and little impetus to commit themselves to the organisational cause.

General impressions of "*my organisation*" from the first-person perspective of employees seem to be a significant factor in organisational outcomes via the employee experience. The collation of studies that solicit employees' views on the overall internal functioning of their organisation, general impressions of its management, and extent to which they feel that they are part of a company that values, develops, and harnesses its workforce consistently demonstrate positive associations with these variables and employees' general disposition towards their work and the organisation (Van Woerkom and Meyers, 2015; Kim and Park, 2019; Mroueh and de Waal, 2020). The various investigations that consider ethical

perceptions within the organisation suggest that an employee's sense of *all being well* is bound to a sense of all being "*good*" in their organisation also (Schwepker et al., 2020). With the impactful role that employee perceptions of management – from direct line-managers to top decision-makers – appear to have on outcomes for both the employee and the organisation, the next section turns attention to the potential underlying experiential mechanism that links these variables together.

3.3. A proposed mechanism through which mutual gains are attained

The above three subsections have presented an array of investigations that involve the experience of employees with respect to HRM practices, direct line-management, and overall management and organisational conduct. The findings presented across these investigations reveal the power of employee perceptions regarding management in shaping not only personal but also organisational outcomes. Building on this conceptual basis, an experiential model of MEO interaction can be developed (Figure 3.1.), which comprises three main features: (1) an employee's perception of management activity, (2) an employee's subsequent perception of their organisation's overarching character, and (3) an employee's resultant orientation towards the organisation. This proposed model is expounded below.

Extensive research that has considered the employee experience of HRM practices highlights the influence of personal perceptions regarding their implementation. Studies suggest that HRM practices such as HPWS and work-family policies positively influence both an employee's well-being and organisational orientation when they are well-received, as is reflected in expressions such as motivation, commitment, and OCB (Medina-Garrido et al., 2021; Huang and He, 2022). Conversely, perceived deficiencies in these HRM dimensions seem to lead to antithetical outcomes for organisations through negative feelings such as a sense of exploitation and reduced well-being (Katou, 2022). This evidence suggests the importance of not just HRM as a core function of an organisation but as a potential practical means to optimise the employee experience within the organisation to achieve desirable performance-related outcomes.

Studies focusing on employee experiences of their direct line-management reveal the influence that immediate supervisors have on employee well-being and performance potential. Positive perceptions of line-managers – spanning role-model behaviour, inclusiveness, gratitude, ethicality, authenticity, and servant leadership qualities – consistently demonstrate associations with a range of positive outcomes for both employees and organisations, such as lower turnover intentions, higher job satisfaction, and enhanced engagement (Schaufeli, 2015; Samad et al., 2022). The similar findings across studies suggests that the distinction between different leadership “styles” may be less relevant from the employee’s experiential perspective, as the presence of positive leadership perceptions generally results in favourable outcomes irrespective of the distinctions drawn by scholars (Alvesson, 2020). Ultimately, effective and supportive line-managers are an evidently incredibly important connection between the organisation and employees.

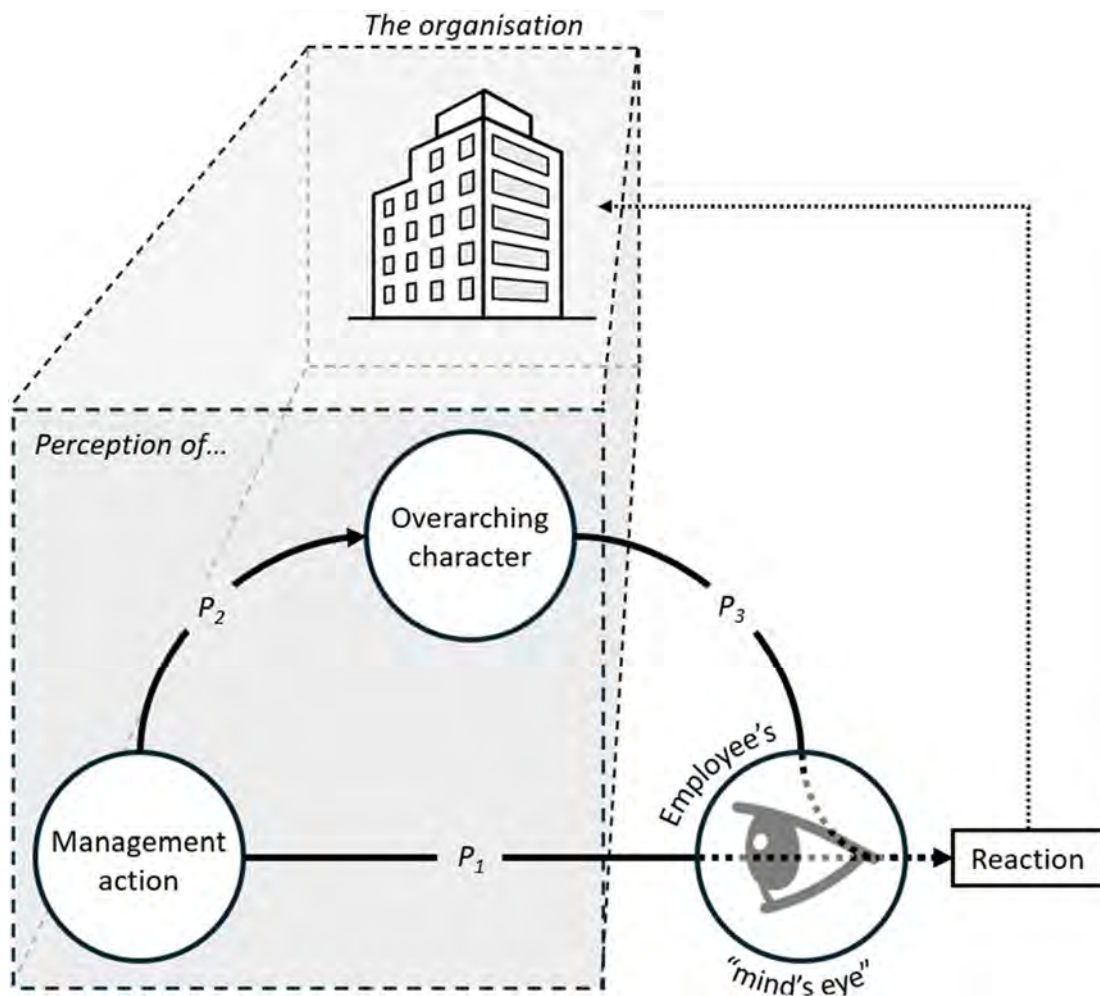
Without negating the importance of employees’ perceptions of HRM practices and their direct line-management, a broader focus on general management and organisational conduct shows a notable association between more comprehensive employee perceptions regarding the actions and character of all coworkers, but especially those in management. Within this lesser explored subset of the acquired literature, studies mainly examined the ethical character of management and the organisation as perceived by employees. The synthesis of these studies suggests that favourable employee impressions of overall ethical management, fair treatment of employees, and the virtuous nature of the organisation positively influence their trust in management, well-being, and consequently their work and organisational orientation (Rego et al., 2010; Mozumder, 2018; Singh et al., 2018; Ambrose et al., 2021). In essence, perceptions of positive character within the organisation seem to contribute to a positive impression of the organisation overall, which coincides with more favourable outcomes for the organisation’s people and performance.

Complementary to the subset of investigations that focused on positive organisational character, the study of Mroueh and de Waal (2020) demonstrated that employee perceptions of the internal performance of their management and organisation in terms of general activity (e.g., *management applies fast decision-making*) and character (e.g., *management has integrity*) positively associated with multiple variables indicative of a personally and professionally beneficial orientation towards their company. While this study

differs from others that focused on ethical perceptions rather than internal organisational performance, similarly positive associations were observed, such as work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction (Lee et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2018; Mroueh and de Waal, 2020).

Collectively, these prior findings suggest that employees' perceptions of management activity influence their overall orientation with respect to the organisation and alignment with its performance interest (e.g., Mroueh and de Waal, 2020; Salas-Vallina et al., 2020). Additionally, they indicate that employee perceptions of management activity affect their overarching perception of their organisation's character (e.g., Mozumder, 2018). This aligns with the suggestion of Kahn (2007: 199), that positive or negative views of the actions of people within the organisation influence 'people's movements toward or away not simply from one another, but toward or away from the organization itself'. Accordingly, it appears that how an employee sees management practice through their 'mind's eye' (Rorty, 1979: 25) is a pivotal determinant of the extent to which their organisation will benefit from their human potential. This mechanism is visualised in Figure 3.1, below.

Figure 3.1. An experiential model of MEO interaction



Considered as an ever-present feature of employee-organisation interaction, this experiential model shifts thinking beyond discretised outcomes of mutual gains, mutual losses, or conflicting outcomes (Peccei et al., 2013). Rather, it acknowledges the presence of a continual gain and loss potential for the organisation through its interdependence with the employee experience. This ideation rests on three foundational propositions, denoted by the arrows in Figure 3.1:

Proposition 1 (P_1): An employee's perception of management activity directly influences their organisational performance alignment.

Proposition 2 (P_2): An employee's perception of management activity directly influences their perception of their organisation's overarching character.

Proposition 3 (P₃): An employee's perception of their organisation's overarching character, which is influenced by their perception of management activity, serves as a predictor of their organisational performance alignment.

Together, these propositions imply that the mental imagery employees form through their interaction with the management of their organisation significantly affects their relative organisational orientation. While it remains to be confirmed, the extant evidence suggests that this is not simply a direct cause-and-effect relationship (i.e., perceived action and accordant reaction), but that it is a relationship partially mediated by the organisational character that manifests in the employee's mind's eye through their interaction with it.

In line with a paradox perspective, this perceptual process indicates how both positive and negative organisational dynamics can proliferate within an organisational system depending on employee perspectives (Hahn and Knight, 2021a). Studies suggest that the extent to which an individual employee may be experiencing (perceiving) the management within their organisation to be "good" (or better yet, "excellent") means that they are more likely to be positively oriented towards their work and organisation (e.g., Mroueh and de Waal, 2020; Salas-Vallina et al., 2020). But this means that the antithesis is also true. For example, Mroueh and de Waal's (2020) findings indicate that an employee who selects "*not at all*" to the prompt "*management applies strong leadership*" or "*management inspires organisational members to achieve extraordinary results*" is more likely to respond "*never*", "*strongly disagree*", and "*very unsatisfied*" to respective statements regarding their frequency of work engagement, sense of organisational commitment, and extent of job satisfaction (Mroueh and de Waal, 2020). It follows that these would be employees less likely inclined to go above and beyond for their organisation than their more positively perceiving colleagues.

An important point that this processual conceptualisation raises is the blurriness of the boundary between the respective benefits (mutual gains) for people and performance. Considering the many studies that demonstrate a consistent correlation between an employee's view of management and their general orientation towards or away from their work and organisation, it seems that employee well-being measures (including happiness) can serve as somewhat precursory performance indicators. Taking for example the abovementioned variables of expressed subjective work engagement, organisational

commitment, and job satisfaction, these have all been associated with organisational performance-related outcomes. While as a triad these variables are commonly referred to as HAW (Fisher, 2010; Mroueh and de Waal, 2020; Salas-Vallina et al., 2020), beyond their respective associations with self-reported performance in two studies of this review (i.e., Medina-Garrido et al., 2021; Kaltiainen and Hakanen, 2022), prior research suggests that these reflections of an employee's attitude and feelings are also indirect indicators of performance. For example, Kim et al. (2013) found work engagement to be positively associated with employee performance as rated by supervisors and colleagues. Similarly, Harrison et al. (2006) found that higher employee organisational commitment and job satisfaction predicted greater supervisor-rated task and in-role performance and OCB, as well as lesser withdrawal in terms of lateness, absenteeism, and turnover. Further, in an economic analysis, Edmans (2012) found job satisfaction to predict higher stock returns. Given the consistently observed impact of management on these outcomes, it appears – analogous to Newton's third law of motion³ – that *for every perceived management action, there is a relative and corresponding employee reaction* from which organisations stand to gain or lose.

3.4. Yet have mutual gains actually been attained? A critique of the mismatch between research and reality

While the concept of mutual gains offers an appealing vision of harmonious employment relations, it is important also to recognise that the practical reality often diverges from this ideal. A significant body of research has shown the importance of positive employee experiences in achieving desirable organisational outcomes. Surveys and statistical models have provided valuable insights into the factors that influence employee well-being and performance. However, these approaches have limitations, as they can only scratch the surface of the complex multidimensional world of employee experience.

Despite the abundance of studies supporting the potential of mutual gains attainment, a closer examination of average questionnaire scores within these studies reveals a disconnect between this potential reality and the actual experiences of employees. For example, while

³ For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.

Jo et al. (2020) found favourable employee perceptions of HPWS to be significantly associated with a sense of thriving at work, employee ratings of their organisation's implementation of HPWS were on average 3.41 on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). This suggests that the average employee does not even *agree* (i.e., 4 on the scale) that their organisation implements HPWS effectively. Accordingly, on average, employees did not feel that they were thriving at work, with this value being only 4.81 on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) (Jo et al., 2020). In a similar study of perceived HIWS and employee HAW, despite a significant association between these variables, employees on average barely agreed that their branch implemented these HRM practices effectively, with an average score among 783 employees in 111 branches of 4.24 on a scale from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*) (Salas-Vallina et al., 2020). Accordingly, employees were on average distinctly *not* happy at work, with this value being only 3.21 on the same scale.

Likewise, leadership studies also show that employees are not experiencing the ideals of management. Over 2000 employees in the study conducted by Samad et al. (2022) on average only perceived their manager to exhibit transformational leadership behaviours somewhere between *sometimes* (2) and *fairly often* (3) (average score 2.53). Meanwhile, these employees on average did not even *moderately agree* (4) that they were satisfied with their jobs (average score 3.92) (Samad et al., 2022). Indeed, the reality according to employees in Walumbwa et al.'s (2008) study of authentic, ethical, and transformational leadership is that rarely are these ideals embodied in managers. The respective average scores of 2.66 and 2.36 on a frequency scale from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*frequently, if not always*) for authentic and transformational leadership, and an average score of 3.58 on a likelihood scale from 1 (*highly unlikely*) to 5 (*highly likely*), suggest that on average managers only sometimes seem to their subordinates to be exhibiting these various leadership ideals (Walumbwa et al., 2008). In the same study, with the reported significant correlations between these behaviours and employee satisfaction with their manager, it is unsurprising that on average employees were not satisfied with their manager, with a mean rating of 1.85 on a scale of 1 to 3 indicating disagreement to agreement (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Therefore, while HRM and leadership theories offer promising managerial blueprints, they are often dissociated from the realities upon which they are formed. This disjunct suggests

that there is a need for alternative research avenues to capture the nuances of employee experiences more accurately (Atkinson and Hall, 2011).

In accordance with Alvesson's (2020) critique of leadership studies, this review finds that there is a tendency among investigations to perpetuate an idealised image of management that is inconsistent with the majority of employees' realities. Many studies seem to be leading theory with "*style*" and not *experience*. Although these leadership styles are not devoid of value – insofar as they offer something for managers to aim for – they often portray a prefabricated utopian vision of management that does not reflect the lived realities of most employees. In much the same way that Loon et al. (2019: 171) notes that in management practice there is 'still a tendency to introduce a single practice for a single purpose', there appears to be an equally prevalent tendency in management research to focus on narrow theoretical dimensions of the employee experience.

As mean scores from numerous leadership studies suggests that employees frequently perceive their management to be less – and therefore something other – than these ideals, it therefore may be of equal or greater value to management theory and practice to explore this more common first-hand experience without predefined leadership labels (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). Indeed, while there is extensive research showing how critical the subjective employee experience is in determining performance-related outcomes, there is a relative paucity of research that takes the employee experience as its primary point of analysis. Much of the existing research has focused on isolated elements of perception, such as HRM practices and leadership styles, rather than the holistic employee experience (Batat, 2022).

To address this, complementary to the popular hypothetico-deductive approach, further research in this area should adopt a more abductive perspective that integrates deduction with exploratory, inductive methods. This research approach could offer a balance between research that *confirms* and research that *learns* through its process. If the performance management paradox persists despite decades of predominantly hypothesis-driven studies, then there is a strong justification for exploring alternative means of theoretical development regarding it.

This is, of course, not an outright rejection of quantification. Inferential statistics remain valuable for supporting suggestions of causality (Hair et al., 2019). For instance, mediation analysis can help to develop a richer understanding of the perceptual mechanisms through which specific management activity may positively impact upon employee experiences. With statistical support, these variables and indicators can become fresh ‘attention points’ for managers to guide their own practice (de Waal, 2012a: 41).

In conclusion, while the theoretical ideal of mutual gains suggests that masterful HRM, leadership, and overall organisational orchestration *can* create win-win situations for both employees and employers, the very empirical evidence upon which these notions rely highlights the challenges and contradictions inherent in the process. The performance management paradox persists, which entails the need for a more nuanced, balanced, and open approach to understanding employee experiences in complex organisational contexts. By adopting complementary research methods and focusing on the lived realities of employees, management science may be able to access more accurate and meaningful insights that bridge the gap between theory and practice.

3.5. Review summary

The integrative review in this chapter and the conceptual review of Chapter 2 have laid a comprehensive foundation for understanding the complex dynamics between management practice and the employee experience. Through a blend of historical and contemporary literature, Chapter 2 began by establishing the constant challenge that befalls management in the process of organising – the performance management paradox. Thereafter, it addressed the burgeoning interest in the employee experience, and the centrality of subjective well-being/happiness to this felt, conscious experience of working for an organisation. From this, it then integrated the employee experience and paradox theoretical perspectives to elucidate the pivotal role of the former in mastering the practical challenges of people and performance management.

This chapter subsequently built upon this by showing that recent research in the popular management subdomains of HRM and leadership, along with the apparently lesser explored domain of general management, have offered abundant evidence regarding the various

ways that employees and organisations can simultaneously benefit from management that is attuned to the employee experience. Collectively, these prior investigations informed the development of a theoretical model of MEO interaction based in the employee experience (Figure 3.1), which warrants further empirical investigation of its underpinning propositions. Doing so would shift the focus of people and performance management away from popular areas such as formal HRM systems and abstracted leadership styles, directing attention towards management action as perceived by the employee who reacts to it.

Further, by adopting a more critical view of the extant literature, an important issue was identified among many of the reviewed investigations. Dominantly, prior studies seem to have developed theories concerning the employee experience from a notably detached and idealistic perspective that says much about “best practice” and what to aim for in management, but much less about the nuanced reality of the management that employees actually experience (Cunha and Putnam, 2019). In light of the enduring nature of the performance management paradox and the relative dearth of research into the employee experience amid it, three complementary research questions are set out below to guide further investigation. The shared aim of these questions is to generate novel insights from the employee perspective for managers throughout the ranks to leverage for the mutual benefit of their organisation’s people and performance.

3.5.1. Research questions

One of the most significant themes identified in the extant literature is the significant influence that an employee’s perception of management – be this HRM, direct line-management, or general management – has upon their overall organisational orientation. Recurrent findings across investigations indicate that positive employee perceptions of management coincide with positive personal orientations towards the organisation (and vice versa). It is, therefore, fundamental to organisational performance that employee perceptions of management are as positive as possible. However, the paradox perspective reveals that management must work to ensure these positive perceptions within a continually changing context of limited financial, temporal, and human resources, and a multiplicity of perspectives regarding how they should be – or should have been –

transacted (Smith and Lewis, 2011). This implies that if management were able to drive performance by increasing the positive potential of employee perception, wherever and however they can afford to do so, they should. There is ever the matter of cost in this endeavour (limited financial and temporal resources), but something that should not cost too greatly is consulting employees on their views of management performance and their overall experience of working for the organisation. The information gained, in both raw and refined forms, may provide valuable attention points for management to focus on in practice (de Waal, 2012a).

With this in mind, there appears to be an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of *how* performance-related management action can simultaneously serve the people and performance of an organisation *via* the subjective employee experience. This idea develops principally upon the research of Mroueh and de Waal (2020), who demonstrated a direct association between employee perceptions of their organisation's internal performance and employee work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction. However, research has yet to address more specifically how the underpinning management *actions* within the broader array of HPO variables relate to these mutually beneficial outcomes (de Waal, 2012a).

Accordingly, by operationalising the proposed MEO model (Figure 3.1), the present investigation seeks to identify how management can respond to the performance demands of their organisation via the employee experience. Based on the reviewed evidence, it is postulated that employee perceptions of management activity influence their work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction, both directly and indirectly via perceptions of organisational character (Lee et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2018; Mroueh and de Waal, 2020). Trialling this postulation may generate actionable insights for management through a deeper understanding of how these variables relate. This line of inquiry is guided by the following research question (RQ), which arguably encapsulates the paradoxical mission of management:

RQ1: How can management simultaneously serve the people and performance of their organisation?

Further to the above question, the relative nascency of the employee experience research focus, despite many decades of management and organisation studies, indicates that there is limited understanding of how employees personally rationalise their *being* (presence) in the organisation. The review of the literature in this chapter suggests that prior research regarding what works best for people (and performance) has predominantly focused on narrow aspects of working life (e.g., ideal traits in a line-manager or HRM best practice); but such investigations may not cut to the core of what brings employees to work for an organisation in particular, and what it is that makes them stay and leave. Regarding the interest of management, such insight would be of competitive advantage for any organisation seeking to enhance or maintain performance from a perspective of ‘productivity through people’ (Peters and Waterman, 1982: 248), as a richer understanding of the underlying reasons why people come to work for a company is one that can be harnessed to attract and retain the best people for the job.

In line with Alvesson’s (2020) call for more openness and neutrality in management studies, and to offer balance to the dominantly ‘logico-deductive’ approach in this research area (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 35), it is proposed that this matter should be examined in a similar fashion to Atkinson and Hall (2011: 102), who theorised upon employees’ ‘own words... not framed by the explanations of current models’. Therefore, this research endeavours to learn from employees’ personal accounts of their respective organisational ‘journeys’ (Batat, 2022: 996) to explore the underlying factors that influence their decisions to work for their current organisation. This exploration is guided by the following research question:

RQ2: Why do employees come to, stay at, and leave their organisation?

Finally, given that the performance management paradox is seemingly ineliminable (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989; Cunha and Putnam, 2019), it is supposed that a “paradox mindset” would be beneficial to exploring ways to overcome the deleterious effects of the tension between organisations and their employees. Miron-Spektor et al. (2018: 27) define individuals who have a paradox mindset to be those who ‘value, accept, and feel comfortable with tensions’, and suggest that such a mentality allows individuals to ‘see tensions as opportunities, confront them, and search for both/and strategies’ to “work

through” them (Lewis and Smith, 2014). To date, this mindset has only been explored in research contexts, rather than being harnessed in the research process itself (Waldman et al., 2019; Pradies, 2023). Therefore, a key focus of this investigation is to actively consult with employees (including managers) to elicit what is essential from management when working through the paradoxical task of ensuring both optimal employee happiness and productivity.

The interdependent demands of employee happiness and productivity, while potentially contradictory in nature, have also the potential to be complementary, or in other words ‘mutually enabling’ (Farjoun, 2010: 203; Glover et al., 2023: 604). The notion of “working through”, rather than trying to “resolve”, this tensional relationship offers a processual perspective from which the fundamental requirements of management can be understood in the context of ‘everyday organizational life’ wherein managerial actions impact employee experiences (Lewis, 2000: 771; Lewis and Smith, 2014). Therefore, guided by employee experiences, the final research question asks:

RQ3: What is essential from management when working through the performance management paradox?

The overarching research aim, along with the interrelated research objectives and questions as outlined in this section are summarised in Table 3.4, below. The following chapter details the methodology used in this project to address these research questions and objectives.

Table 3.4. A summary table of the overarching research aim, research objectives, and research questions

Research aim	
To generate novel insights from the employee perspective for managers throughout the ranks to leverage for the mutual benefit of their organisation's people and performance.	
Research objectives	Research questions
To identify how management can respond to the performance demands of their organisation via the employee experience.	How can management simultaneously serve the people and performance of their organisation?
To explore the underlying factors that influence employees' decisions to work for their current organisation.	Why do employees come to, stay at, and leave their organisation?
To elicit what is essential from management when working through the paradoxical task of ensuring both optimal employee happiness and productivity.	What is essential from management when working through the performance management paradox?

Chapter 4. Methodology and methods

This chapter details the methodological approach adopted in this research project. It opens by developing the theoretical lens employed in the empirical phase of the investigation. It then addresses the need for a pragmatic approach to the research problem and thereafter explains the choice of a convergent mixed methods case study design and the underpinning scientific reasoning for this. The specific methods of data collection and analysis are then detailed before discussing the ethical considerations. The chapter closes with a brief outline of the results chapters that follow.

4.1. Defining the bifocal lens

This investigation employs two lenses to examine the paradoxical problem at hand. Lenses are intangible conceptual devices used in scientific and philosophical inquiry to observe, inspect, or “see” more clearly an aspect of reality. Registering their usage, by explicating them, is as important as declaring the empirical method(s) used to collect and analyse data on a given matter. The lenses that are discussed in the following two subsections are the metatheoretical lens of paradox and the theoretical lens of employee experience amid the paradox which have been developed so far in the conceptual review of Chapter 2. The sections below build upon this basis with an orientation towards their operationalisation in the current project.

4.1.1. The metatheoretical lens of paradox

Since the earliest documentation of paradoxes in organisational studies, the role of people in them has been a continual theme (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Van de Ven, 1983). This has led to a discussion within the field about the ontology of paradox (Hahn and Knight, 2021a). In this debate, some authors have drawn upon the seemingly ‘system-inherent’ properties of organisational paradoxes (Schad and Bansal, 2018: 1495). This perspective focuses on tensions that seem innate in human systems of organisation, such as an organisation’s state of simultaneous and, in some ways, conflicting indebtedness to multiple stakeholder groups

(e.g., its workers, funders, and customers). Via this perspective, it is possible to view how entrenched organisations are in the preconditions that beget the complexities that arise within their processes, and how difficult (if not impossible) it is to propose solutions to problems which do not manifest further undesirable outcomes (Stohl and Cheney, 2001; Smith and Lewis, 2011).

An alternative view is that which observes the ‘socially constructed’ (Schad and Bansal, 2018: 1495) or ‘constitutive’ (Putnam et al., 2016: 12) appearance of paradoxes in the act of organising. This view focuses on how paradoxes appear to be produced by organisational actors through their reactions to contentious circumstances that they encounter (Putnam et al., 2016). Rather than seeing the paradox as an inborn property of the “objective” system of organisational interaction itself (Schad and Bansal, 2018), the constitutive view takes note of the direct role that people play in constructing observable paradoxes through their respectively subjective interactivity. This idea relies on the fact that there can be no such thing as an “organisation” – or a “process” within or surrounding it – without the cause and effect of the people that collectively make it what it is. From this premise, it follows that observed paradoxicality within organisational processes must also be a coproduced feature of these interactions, even if it is thence seen “in the system”, *per se* (Archer, 1982).

While the system-inherent and socially constructed perspectives may be seen as oppositional, it is important to recognise that each merely observes the same phenomenon from a different point of view. Within the context of the performance management paradox, whereby attempts to increase organisational performance can produce unintended detractive effects, the system-inherent view can show how management is formally mandated by the organisation to act strategically to enhance performance (Luthans and Stewart, 1977). Correspondingly, the socially constructed view can reveal how the perception of such actions by employees may hold the key to their success (Margolis and Walsh, 2003). In accepting the merits of both perspectives, the multifaceted nature of the performance management paradox can be more fully appreciated. The system-inherent perspective can provide insights into the structural and procedural origins of paradoxes, while the socially constructed perspective can shine light onto the dynamic and interpretive processes of the people from which they originate through human interaction (Van de Ven, 1983; Ford and Backoff, 1988).

While it may initially seem a conflation to suggest that paradoxes emerge *both* from systems of human interaction *and* the interactions of people within them, it is widely regarded that this is, in fact, a purposeful (and beneficial) feature of paradox theorisation (e.g., Poole and Van de Ven, 1989; Lewis and Smith, 2014; Schad and Bansal, 2018). Lewis and Smith (2014: 129-130), for example, argue that '[p]aradoxical thinking entails a both/and mind-set that is holistic and dynamic, exploring synergistic possibilities for coping with enduring tensions'.

In a continuation of this mindset, the contention between the two former views of paradox led Hahn and Knight (2021a) to offer a third, *probabilistic*, perspective that respects aspects of both, and which opens research to the potential for management to produce more desirable organisational dynamics for an organisation's people and performance (Lewis, 2000). The importance of viewing paradoxes as probabilistic in the first instance, rather than already '*concrete*' in human systems of interactivity (Hahn and Knight, 2021a: 372), is that it permits inquiry into the circumstances that may make paradoxical outcomes more or less likely. Hahn and Knight (2021a: 365) suggest that paradoxes are drawn from a state of 'probabilistic potentiality' by certain (socio)material *and* (socio)discursive circumstances. Where, then, management finds itself in contexts where it has the agency to modify its response to current organisational circumstances, it follows that certain managerial activity has the potential to either increase or decrease the likelihood of propagating observable paradoxical eventualities.

It is important to consider all three of the abovementioned perspectives in any attempt to find organisational activity that may be able to produce more positive organisational dynamics amid paradox. Via Hahn and Knight's (2021a: 381) recognition of the influence of both 'meaning and matter', it can be seen that paradoxicality is the product of more than just the raw "objective" activity of management, but also the subjective perception of such activity by the people who experience it. Therefore, the next section considers how the lens of the employee experience can provide further important detail for the study of the performance management paradox.

4.1.2. The theoretical lens of employee experience

As a theoretical device in organisational studies, the lens of employee experience is intended to be the very lens of the employee's own 'mind's eye' (Rorty, 1979: 25). For this to truly be a perfect portrayal is, of course, strictly not possible, as any attempt to capture what the employee's mind's eye sees is inevitably filtered through the observer's own interpretative lens. 'For how could we ever reach any knowledge of facts if not through sense-perception?' (Popper, 2002: 75). This raises the 'double hermeneutic' issue inherent in all social science (Giddens, 1987: 70). The problem that this poses is that, despite all efforts, 'we cannot know how things are in themselves, but only how they appear to us, how they are relative to us' (Lee, 2005: 34). There is no definite treatment of this hermeneutic situation beyond an acknowledgement and acceptance of it as part and parcel of the research – or rather, *researcher's* – process.

Yet, as science must advance through the '*systematic presentation of our immediate convictions*' and the iterative process of conjecture and refutation (Popper, 1962: 76), to support the accuracy of one's interpretation of another's experience, it is important to consider how the employee experience is a feature of an encompassing human experience. Accordingly, a way for research to comprehend this amorphous and enveloping aspect of consciousness more fully is to engage with the notion of *Dasein*.

4.1.2.1. The employee, *Dasein*

The term *Dasein*, popularised by the ontologist Martin Heidegger, refers to a kind of "being-there" or "presence" that is someone deeply involved in their world and aware of their own existence. *Dasein* is human experience from an egological perspective. As Heidegger (1962: 150) summarises, 'Dasein is an entity which is in each case I myself; its Being is in each case mine'. From this reflexive research perspective, *Dasein* is about a person's 'Being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1962: 79) in an active, participatory sense. This holistic or 'unitary phenomenon' (Heidegger, 1962: 78) entails an acknowledgement of one's primordial 'Being towards the world [Sein zur Welt]' (p. 84) that includes the immersive meld of 'everyday Being-one's-Self [Selbstsein]' and '*Being-with*' [Mitsein] (p. 149) others in a world that is bound by the limits and passing of a lifetime.

This form of being is not merely about the being (existence) of people as objects. Rather, it is about one's primal engagement with the world of experience in a meaningful way, such that value-neutrality and absolute objectivity cease to be a tenable propositions. According to Heidegger (1962: 65), '[Dasein's] existential meaning is *care*' and its being towards the world 'is essentially concern' (p. 84). This is a state of authentic existence where one is fully aware and involved in their own life and surroundings, whereby they operate according to a state of continual concerned circumspection regarding their own well-being and that of others about whom they care.

With respect to research into the employee experience – with Dasein the employee – this perspective emphasises the importance of understanding employees' active and engaged participation in their working world. It suggests that employees are not passive recipients of organisational policies and practices but are prone to moderate the quality and extent of their contribution to the organisation in response to their own experiences.

By recognising employees as Dasein in the context of the performance management paradox, it is possible to draw insight from the point of experience into how managerial activity may elicit more positive organisational dynamics (Lewis, 2000; Lewis and Smith, 2014). At the same time, studying the subjective nature of people in organisation can also offer nuance regarding how sociomaterial and sociodiscursive factors complicate the translation of these empirical insights into practice (Hahn and Knight, 2021a). Ultimately, the Dasein lens responds to calls for 'immersive and comprehensive research methodologies' to gain the requisite depth of insight from the employee experience to inform practice (Batat, 2022: 1007).

4.2. (The need for) a pragmatic investigation into the problem

This investigation ultimately seeks to improve organisational conditions such that they may benefit both their people and performance by drawing insights from the personal experiences of the organisation's performers. In service of this, a pragmatic philosophy underpins the study. Pragmatism is a method of inquiry that aims to relinquish philosophical entrenchment in academia's 'paradigm wars' (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 17). It operates on a basis of intention to allow the research question, rather than scientific

convention, to shape the investigation (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). The ideal of pragmatic inquiry encourages researchers to acknowledge both objective and subjective facets of reality, prioritise data collection based on “what works” to address the question, and to take advantage of the complementary benefits of quantitative and qualitative analysis (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). Adopting this approach helps ensure that this investigation can adequately fathom the complexity of the performance management paradox.

An important point that a pragmatic view of the world recognises is the analogousness of scientific inquiry to the continuous and natural process of “human” inquiry (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) – as the researcher, by their Dasein, embodies this process. This is reasoned on the basis that scientific inquiry is part of human inquiry, since it cannot be separate from it. As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004: 18) argue, scientific inquiry is inseparable from the human experience, forming part of the broader world of ‘human experience in action’. From this perspective, phenomena are best understood through intersubjective truths, that are provisional, agreed-upon understandings shaped by shared human contexts, rather than objective certainties. This worldview resonates with the employee experience research perspective, where the researcher, as a fellow working person, is not an external observer but an intrinsic part of the interpretative process.

Pragmatism’s acknowledgment of the conditionality of scientific inquiry informs this investigation. It distinguishes between capital “T” ‘absolute Truth’ and lowercase “t” ‘provisional truths’ (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 18), and recognises that while the former may be imagined and even held as a goal, the latter that is derived from empirical observation and experiential engagement is inherently ‘temporary’ and context dependent (James, 1907: 223). As James (1912: 17) writes on the matter:

[W]hen as empiricists we give up the doctrine of objective certitude, we do not thereby give up the quest or hope of truth itself. We still pin our faith on its existence, and still believe that we gain an ever better position towards it by systematically continuing to roll up experiences and think.

This exploratory ethos of pragmatism is foundational to this study’s design, which embraces the iterative process of “rolling up experiences and thinking” in hope of finding ways to ameliorate the paradoxical tensions in organisational performance management.

As mentioned above, Hahn and Knight (2021a: 372) assert that it is both ‘matter and meaning [that] constitute what we can know about the world and its natural and social phenomena’. This implies that paradoxical situations are co-determined by these properties, making them particularly well-suited to a pragmatic method of reasoning. Pragmatism enables conditional reasoning, offering clarity and resolution through terms tied to specific contexts (James, 1907). This approach supports iterative constructive actions within organisational systems, which can transcend the entrenched dichotomy of the system-inherent versus socially constructed understanding of paradoxes (Schad and Bansal, 2018). By recognising that the presence of paradox in organisations is essentially *inherited* through human actions (Van de Ven, 1983), this investigation pursues a line of inquiry that seeks to diffuse these tensions through intentional and constructive engagement. Accordingly, such problematic ‘structural regularities’ in human systems may gradually become *restructured* through intention (Yvonne Feilzer, 2010: 13).

It is with the hopeful orientation to which James (1912) alludes that pragmatism can be seen to be more than just a philosophical foundation for this investigation but also an axiological commitment to promoting positive change. Sleeper (1986: 8-9) describes pragmatism as ‘dedicated to the transformation of culture, to the resolution of conflicts that divide us’. This investigation’s study of the performance management paradox is not motivated solely by intellectual curiosity, but by an emancipatory ambition to address the potential harm that such paradoxes may inflict upon individuals and organisations. This aligns with James (1907: 290-291) vision of a world collaboratively constructed, where progress hinges on the collective efforts of individuals to do their ‘level best’. By approaching paradoxes as opportunities for co-operative action and iterative improvement, this study situates itself as a hopeful, albeit challenging, journey towards organisational betterment for people and performance. The following section presents how this pragmatism was employed in a convergent mixed methods case study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

4.3. Research design: convergent mixed methods case study

Given this study’s pragmatic foundation, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data and analytic methods was deemed the most appropriate means of answering the research

questions. These different research techniques were applied in a convergent mixed methods case study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). Pragmatism's emphasis on integrating diverse perspectives and iterative inquiry lends itself to methodological pluralism, which has the potential to provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex organisational phenomena (Yvonne Feilzer, 2010). This pluralistic approach ensures that the research problem is understood from multiple research angles and that inferences and recommendations are supported by the combination of different forms of data analysis (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

Combining quantitative and qualitative analyses is also particularly useful for capitalising on the respective strengths that different methods offer while mitigating their respective weaknesses through 'counter-balancing' (Jick, 1979: 604). For example, where qualitative findings can lack generalisability, complementary observations in statistically significant quantitative results can reinforce assertions made upon them (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). Similarly, where quantitative data (e.g., survey responses) may be seen as too abstracted from personal experiences (Alvesson, 2020), the depth of qualitative data can provide richer narrative detail (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The methodological pluralism of mixed methods research is often criticised for being internally inconsistent due to apparently incommensurate ontological and epistemological assumptions (Morgan, 2007; Maxwell, 2023). This view suggests that mixed methods research is 'a philosophical oxymoron, or at least a problematic union' (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2010: 146). Consider, for instance, the analysis of qualitative spoken and written data: such data are undeniably perfused not only with the subjective values and perceptions of the people from whom they originate, but also with the interpretation of the researcher(s) who process them to yield insights and make assertions. Seen from the paradigmatic perspective of positivism or falsificationism, this 'creative presence' of the researcher in the research is problematic (Eakin and Gladstone, 2020: 4), as it contravenes the axioms of objective observation and value-free analysis and inference (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Such qualitative research is, as Denzin et al. (2024: 20) suggest, 'haunted by a double-faced ghost'.

However, while accepting that the 'human-as-instrument' creates a complex of hermeneutic possibilities, the human inquirer can add instrumental additional value to an inquiry through

their innate ability to sense and respond to incalculable cues, and thereby 'interact with the situation to sense its dimensions' in ways that conventional instruments of quantification cannot (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 193). This means that different methods of human scientific inquiry possess relative strengths and weaknesses. And, as no single social-scientific method 'can grasp the subtle variations in ongoing human experience' (Denzin et al., 2024: 20), individual investigations can benefit from their combination. In their advocacy of mixing qualitative and quantitative methods, Guba and Lincoln (2005: 201) argue that commensurability of approach only becomes an issue 'when researchers want to "pick and choose" among axioms of positivist and interpretivist models, because the axioms are contradictory and mutually exclusive'. But it is a separate issue altogether to bind the application of quantitative and qualitative research methods exclusively to the axioms of particular philosophies of science (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Niglas, 2010).

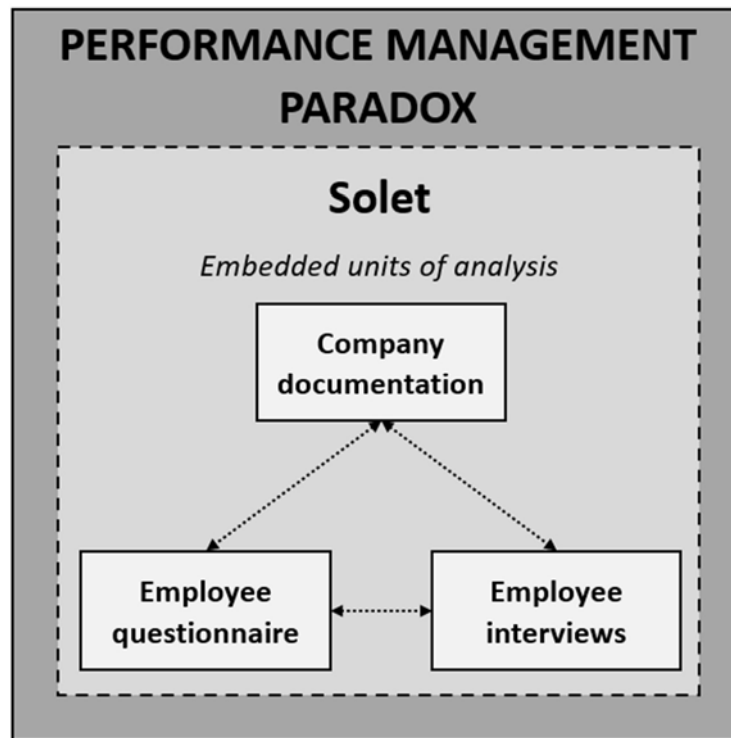
The pragmatic justification for mixing quantitative and qualitative research techniques is a question of practical utility rather than traditional philosophical attributions (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2010). As Guba and Lincoln (1994: 117) caveat in their analysis of "competing" paradigms in research, their categorical descriptions 'are apt as broad brush strokes, if not always at the individual level'. On this basis, researcher reflexivity becomes key to identifying the assumptions that influence the design and direction of the research (Archibald, 2023).

Accordingly, core to the current investigation is the ontological assumption that reality can be as both the realist and relativist views argue, insofar as they are each only partial and actually not at odds, because they are simply observing different dimensions of reality (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Niglas, 2010). Reality remains far vaster and more complex than can be entirely understood by either quantitative or qualitative means of inference alone. Following this ontological premise, the adjoining epistemological position is then to accept that knowledge about many phenomena can be gained through observable patterns in numeric, closed-ended data as well as textual (and contextual), open-ended exploration (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Additionally, the mixed methodological position asserts that combining approaches can produce further insight through the way quantities and qualities mutually inform. Fetters and Freshwater (2015: 116) express this mathematically as ' $1 + 1 = 3$. That is, qualitative + quantitative = more than the individual components'.

As this study sought to engage with the reality of experience – a distinctly unique and yet ubiquitous phenomenon – qualitative and quantitative research techniques were seen to offer access to different but complementary insights. The qualitative strand sought to provide depth, by exploring how employees articulate their personal organisational realities, and context, by embedding these experiences within the case of a single organisation. The quantitative strand, while methodologically distinct, complemented this by indicating broader patterns that emerge from lived experience. Heidegger's (1962) concept of Dasein emphasises the situated, interpretative nature of human experience through a being-in-the-world that cannot be abstracted from its context. And so, this mixed methods approach reflects a layered epistemology that respects the hermeneutic richness of Dasein while pragmatically leveraging statistical tools to extend its organisational relevance. This aligns with Sandelowski et al.'s (2009: 209) perspective to the extent that the 'qualitative and quantitative data are not so much different kinds of data as these data are experiences formed into, for example, words or numbers, respectively'.

The use of mixed methods within the bounds of a single organisation follows Yin's (2014) description of a single-case design with multiple embedded units of analysis. This is visualised in Figure 4.1, below, which shows the three units of analysis (i.e., company documentation, employee questionnaire, and employee interviews) within the single case of a UK-based organisation pseudonymised as "Solet", which is in turn situated within the context of the performance management paradox.

Figure 4.1. The multiple embedded units of analysis case study design (adapted from Yin, 2014: 50)



The organisation at the centre of this investigation (Solet) was chosen to provide ‘real-world context’ for exploring the potential mechanisms thorough which the performance management paradox (the phenomenon) may be mastered in practice (Yin, 2014: 2). In this sense it constitutes what Flyvbjerg (2006: 109) refers to as a ‘paradigmatic case’. A paradigmatic case is intended to provide a prototypical example of the phenomenon under investigation (Gill, 2014), and thereby act as a case that highlights ‘more general characteristics of the societies in question’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 111). In other words, the organisation at centre of this study is used in an ‘instrumental’ sense to develop a greater understanding about the paradoxical phenomenon that operates in all organisations in some way, shape, or form (Stake, 1995: 3). Instrumental cases, according to Stake (1995: 16), help research to move from a state of ‘puzzlement’ about a particular research problem towards understanding and explanation via fieldwork. Additionally, the richness of detail that can be provided by a case study is especially useful ‘when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (Yin, 2009: 18). This is particularly relevant in the study

of management paradoxes, where the effects of objective matters and subjective experiences of them become enmeshed (Hahn and Knight, 2021a).

Solet was chosen as the case organisation in this investigation because – like many other organisations – it operates amid the challenge of balancing its declared commitments to its people and performance as it seeks to excel. As is demonstrated in the first results chapter (Chapter 5), Solet is presented as an organisation aspiring to excellence in its field by acknowledging and addressing the tension between the interest of profit and the interests of its employees who work to ensure it (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Glover et al., 2023). Indeed, recalling Taylor’s (1919: 9) teleological definition of management, that the ‘principle object of management should be to secure the maximum prosperity for the employer, coupled with the maximum prosperity for each employé’, Solet appears to be an exemplar of this orientation in practice, and proudly governed by this telos⁴. In this light, with the paradoxicality that must be managed in the process of organisation, Solet was seen as an ideal ‘real-life’ contemporary case (Yin, 2009: 18) to explore the potential for managerial mastery in the tradition of paradox scholarship (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Van de Ven, 1983; Quinn, 1988).

From this example of an organisation operating amid paradox, generalisations can be tentatively elucidated (Flyvbjerg, 2006). As is shown in the next chapter, the case organisation boasts an outstanding track record of people and performance management, which implies that valuable managerial information may be gained from an investigation into it. Yet, at the same time, it is not so different from other organisations that the findings drawn from it could only be intrinsically relevant to itself and no other (Stake, 1995).

This empirical consideration attends to the criticism that it is not appropriate to generalise from a case study (Flyvbjerg, 2006), and especially a single case study. Of course, it could be argued that a collective case study, comprising multiple cases analysed in a number of contexts (Goddard, 2010), could provide a stronger evidence-basis for generalisable theoretical contributions. However, while bigger may seem better – meaning a collective case study should be superior – this may not necessarily be so. Aside from the fact that collective case studies often form part of larger projects requiring resources and timescales

⁴ As a side note, the pseudonym “Solet” was chosen as it is “telos” backwards.

beyond the scope of a PhD (Goddard, 2010), the additional investigatory investments could still be subjected to the same criticisms that the one or few extra cases still form an insufficient foundation upon which one can construct generalisable claims. Furthermore, as the volume of information accumulates, ultimately the detail with which it can be realistically analysed diminishes (Crowe et al., 2011). Resultantly, in this investigation it was decided that it would be more favourable to play to the strength of the case study method, *depth* of data, rather than its weakness, *breadth* of data.

Before moving to the methods of data collection and analysis (Section 4.5), the following section details the scientific reasoning underlying them.

4.4. Underlying scientific reasoning: abduction

Within social science scholarship, there exists a notable concern about the foundational reasoning employed by researchers in their investigations. Mixed methods case study research led by pragmatism is especially vulnerable to accusations of incoherence by staunch defenders of particular research conventions for the way it blends approaches that they see to be incompatible (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). This can pressure scholars to hastily sign-up to one of a selection of extant and rivalling schools-of-thought to declare their reasoning, rather than allowing it to simply be what it more likely is: ‘messy, idiosyncratic, and difficult to articulate’ (Van Maanen et al., 2007: 1149). While it is crucial that a researcher seeks to understand the foundations of their own theorisation process as far as is humanly possible, there is an acute irony in the harm that choosing a prepackaged paradigm can inflict upon the potential of their research. Choice is as much a selection of something as it is a rejection, exclusion, and omission of all other possibility.

It may be that some scientists forget – or are resistant to admit – that philosophical foundations are theoretical. As the Duhem-Quine thesis suggests, these foundations comprise the auxiliary assumptions upon which empiricism relies, but which empiricism can neither support nor refute (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Nescience of this can have the effect of restricting a researcher’s judgement (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989) by binding their research in a mental ‘strait-jacket’ (Crowe et al., 2011: 7). With this, a researcher can develop ‘a “trained incapacity” to appreciate aspects not mentioned in her or his theory’

such that while their theory may seem more “perfect” by conventional standards, it may ultimately bear less resemblance ‘to the multifaceted reality it seeks to portray’ (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989: 563).

To this end, before detailing the specific methods of data collection and analysis, it is worth registering the presence in this case study of a process that Dubois and Gadde (2002) coined “systematic combining”. Systematic combining in case study research can be neither categorised as inductive (starting with observation) nor deductive (starting with theory). Rather, it is a process that recognises the power of – and our natural tendency to – develop theory through the iterative corroboration of thought and observation; as Putnam (1981: xi) put it, ‘the mind and world jointly make up the mind and world’. Dubois and Gadde (2002: 554) describe systematic combining as ‘a process where theoretical framework, empirical fieldwork, and case analysis evolve simultaneously’.

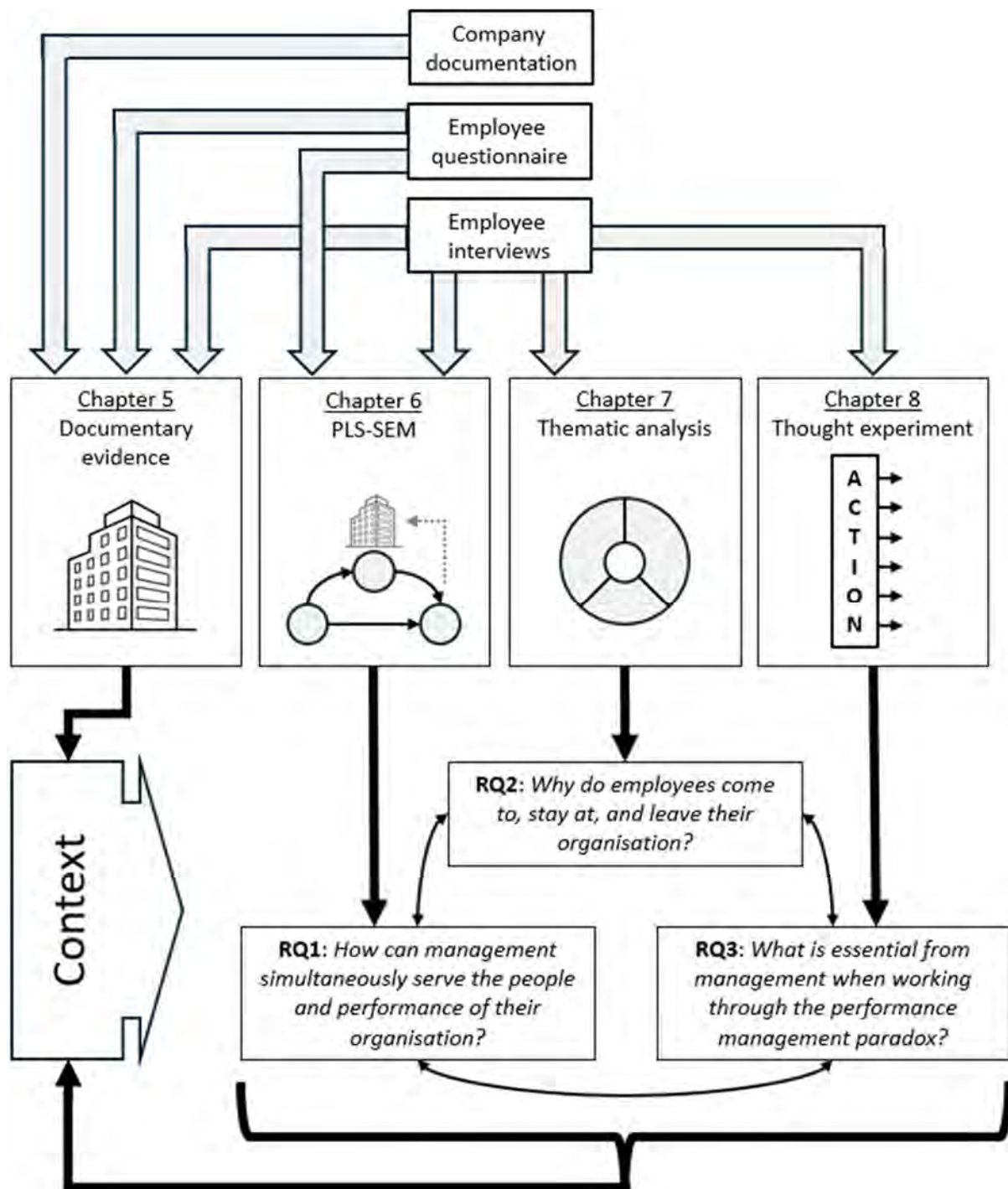
Systematic combining is regarded as an abductive form of inference, or what has also been described as ‘inference to the best explanation’ (Walton, 2014: xiii). Van Maanen et al. (2007: 1149) note that abduction is the form of reasoning that ‘likely goes on in most if not all promising research projects’, albeit often without being stated. The importance of registering this is that it exposes the ‘false antithesis’ between quantitative and qualitative traditions in social science (Grix, 2019: 80), on the basis that it is impossible – or at least highly unwise – to conduct research to the exclusion of our natural faculties of induction or deduction (Ragin, 1994).

Registering the presence of abduction in the current research has particular relevance to the statistical dimension of the investigation, which employed partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). This quantitative research method could be mistaken as a purely deductive approach if one is to go by conventional assumptions about statistics. However, this would be a naïve reduction of the nature of the modelling process itself, as is shown through the views of the statistician who first developed the PLS approach, Wold (1982), in Section 4.5.2.3.2.

4.5. Methods of data collection and analysis

The following subsections detail the purposes, collection processes, and analysis processes, of the three units of analysis. This begins with the publicly available online documentation of the organisation, followed by the employee questionnaire, and thereafter the employee interviews. Figure 4.2, below, provides a schematic of how these data sources were utilised, where they feature in the forthcoming results chapters, and their primary contribution to the investigation.

Figure 4.2. A schematic of the three units of analysis, their respective utilisation in the analyses, and the respective purposes of the analyses



4.5.1. Company documentation

4.5.1.1. *Purposes of the company documentation*

The company documentation provided quantitative (including financial) and qualitative contextual data that were used in two primary ways: (1) to provide a comprehensive external (etic) overview of the company through its historical growth and financial performance, and (2) to instantiate a case of the performance management paradox in Solet. These findings are reported in the following chapter (Chapter 5).

4.5.1.2. *Company documentation data collection process*

To gather evidence from an etic perspective about Solet as an organisation in the context of the performance management paradox, the document collection process began with an exploration of its website, which offered an illustration of the organisation as portrayed by its directors and representative decision-makers through a public online interface. This exploration commenced with the “About Solet” webpage, which was accessed via the main Solet landing page. The About Solet page prominently featured the company’s values, story, and impact mission, alongside a timeline of awards and its current social partnerships, initiatives, and pledges. This page also provided a direct link to download the company’s 2022 social (i.e., people and planet) “Impact Report”, the content of which was analysed according to its relevance to the employee experience and performance management paradox.

The “Investor relations” page was also accessed from the main Solet landing page. This provided a link to the consolidated financial statements of Solet’s ultimate parent company (pseudonymised as Goniki⁵ TopCo) for the tax year ending 30th September 2022. This document is the same as can be found on Companies House, where standalone financial statements for Solet for the same tax year were also obtained. As the same serving directors were registered consistently across Solet, Goniki TopCo, and the intermediate corporate entities, the content of these documents was deemed pertinent to Solet’s employees. This conclusion was reinforced by the observation that no employees were registered at any level above Solet within the corporate hierarchy. Relevant contextual aspects that feature in Chapter 5 were drawn from the *Directors’ report* of the Goniki TopCo document, the

⁵ This Greek word (γονική) translates to “parental” in English.

Directors' responsibility statement of the Solet document, and the *strategic reports* and *notes to the financial statements* of both documents. To provide an overview of Solet's historical performance, a timeline of the company's staff numbers and operating profit (adjusted for exceptional items and other income beyond standard operations) was generated by extracting these figures from the company's annual financial statements from tax year ending September 30th 2011 until 30th September 2022.

The exploratory document collection process also led to the discovery of Solet's ambition to attain B Corporation (B Corp) certification and its related formal endorsement of the Better Business Act. During the primary data collection phase (December 2022 – February 2023), Solet was in the process of gaining its B Corp certification, which it officially obtained shortly after (May 2023). Consequently, information from B Lab (the B Corp certifying body), as well as details about the Better Business Act, were examined.

In addition to this, peripheral documentation of Solet from other sources offered further information about the organisation that had been processed through alternative media beyond its own site. This included a local newspaper article reporting the recent expansion of its headquarters (HQ), with one of its four floors comprising a free-to-use staff well-being and leisure zone (photo-featured in the article), including a gym, rooms for coaching and reflexology, and a games area (foosball, darts, and pool). An online Telegraph article was also used to mark the company's 2015 and 2019 private equity takeovers, the respective values of which supported a comprehensive image of its financial performance. Finally, as a supplemental quantified measure of people's perception of the organisation based on anonymous experiences, review scores submitted to Glassdoor.co.uk in the 12 months leading up to the close of primary data collection (15th February 2023) were collated. An overview of the secondary data sources that are cited in the following chapter is provided in Table 4.1, below.

Table 4.1. A list of secondary data sources regarding the case organisation

Information source	Contextual contribution	Retrieved from	Cited as
A Telegraph article regarding Solet's 2015 and 2019 buyouts	Qualitative	The Telegraph (online)	Telegraph (2019)
Local news article regarding Solet making the 2019 Sunday Times Best Companies List	Qualitative	Local news website	LocalNews (2019)
Local news article regarding Solet expanding its headquarters	Qualitative	Local news website	LocalNews (2020)
Best Companies rating Solet as an Outstanding Company to Work For	Qualitative	Best Companies website	Best Companies (2021)
The Solet Impact Report 2022	Qualitative	Solet website	Solet (2022)
Solet's parent company's annual financial statements for the year ending 30 th September 2022	Qualitative	Solet website	Goniki TopCo (2023)
Solet's "About Solet" webpage	Qualitative	Solet website	Solet (2023a)
Solet's annual financial statements for the year ending 30 th September 2022	Qualitative and quantitative	Companies House	Solet (2023b)
A Solet press release regarding newly attained B Corp status	Qualitative	Solet website	Solet (2023c)
B Lab's "About" B Corp webpage	Qualitative	B Lab website	B Lab (2024a)
B Lab's "Impact Assessment" webpage	Qualitative	B Lab website	B Lab (2024b)
B Lab's "legal requirement" webpage	Qualitative	B Lab website	B Lab (2024c)
B Lab's "Foundation Requirements" webpage	Qualitative	B Lab website	B Lab (2024d)
The Better Business Act "About" webpage	Qualitative	Better Business Act website	Better Business Act (2024)
Solet's Glassdoor reviews	Quantitative	Glassdoor website	Glassdoor (2024)

4.5.1.3. Company documentation data analysis process

The document analysis in this study was characteristically open-ended and exploratory in nature. The aim was to develop a detailed understanding of the organisational context and to situate Solet within the performance management paradox. This process involved examining the publicly available online documentation of the organisation to identify insights relevant to the employee experience and performance management paradox while remaining attentive to the nuances and underlying intentions embedded within the documentation.

Document analysis in a case study context, according to Yin (2014: 74), is more than just a reading exercise – it is an act of ‘listening’ to the intended messages of the originator(s) of the documents. In addition to Yin’s (2014) perspective, it is also important to consider what particular documents or content therein may be saying in light of contextual factors such as legal obligations to report certain information or the appeal of certain information to particular audiences (e.g., investors, awarding bodies, employees, or clientele). By interpreting documents in this way, the analysis considered both explicit content and implicit meanings within the data.

The collected documentation served as more than just a contextual backdrop; it augmented internal (emic) perspectives gathered from employee questionnaires and interviews, with a view to providing a richer, multifaceted understanding of the organisational dynamics (Yin, 2014). The integration of multiple data sources, described by Yin (2014: 74) as processing information through ‘multiple modalities’, ensured a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon under study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). This melding of etic and emic perspectives helped to position Solet as a revelatory case of the performance management paradox (Yin, 2014). The following subsection turns attention to the employee questionnaire, including how it was used in conjunction with secondary data (in Chapter 5) and how it was analysed by way of PLS-SEM and IPMA (in Chapter 6).

4.5.2. Employee questionnaire

4.5.2.1. *Purposes of the questionnaire*

The employee questionnaire served two purposes. The first was to contribute to the documentary evidence of the performance management paradox in Solet, as reported in Chapter 5. The questionnaire provided one of several contextual measures of Solet's overall performance by including a 'descriptive' measure of it from the perspective of its people (Correia et al., 2021: 1359). de Waal's (2012b) HPO scale (Table 4.3) was used for this. The detail of this scale is set out in Section 4.5.2.1.1, below. Two particularly noteworthy contrasting comments written in the open text field of the questionnaire were also drawn upon as exemplars to provide acute insight into the positive and negative (paradoxical) potential of employee perception in performance management.

The second purpose was to provide data for statistical analyses to address the question of how management can simultaneously serve the people and performance of their organisation (RQ1), which are reported in Chapter 6. These analyses were designed to empirically verify the theoretical MEO model developed in Chapter 3. Recalling that this model posits that an employee's perception of management activity influences their organisational performance alignment, and that this effect can be observed via their corresponding perception of the organisation's overarching character (i.e., P_1 , P_2 , and P_3), empirical indicators of these key terms and a set of hypotheses were developed to specify and test their relationships (Lynham, 2002). These testable hypotheses are set out in Table 4.2 below alongside the original theoretical propositions developed in Chapter 3, while the empirical indicators of high-performance management activity (HPMA), HAW, and positive organisational character (POC) are thereafter detailed in respective sections following the next.

Table 4.2. Original theoretical propositions and related testable hypotheses

Original theoretical proposition		Related testable hypothesis (<i>H</i>)	
<i>P</i> ₁	An employee's perception of management activity directly influences their organisational performance alignment.	<i>H</i> ₁	Perceived HPMA is directly positively related to employee HAW.
<i>P</i> ₂	An employee's perception of management activity directly influences their perception of their organisation's overarching character.	<i>H</i> ₂	Perceived HPMA is directly positively related to perceived POC.
<i>P</i> ₃	An employee's perception of their organisation's overarching character, which is influenced by their perception of management activity, serves as a predictor of their organisational performance alignment.	<i>H</i> ₃	Perceived POC is directly positively related to employee HAW.
		<i>H</i> _m	Subject to <i>H</i> ₂ and <i>H</i> ₃ being confirmed, perceived POC complementarily mediates the positive effect of HPMA on HAW.

4.5.2.1.1. High-performance organisation (HPO)

As mentioned above, de Waal's (2012b) HPO scale was used to provide one of several measures of Solet's performance. The scale was originally developed through a literature review of 290 publications to identify potential characteristics of HPOs which were then refined in a two-phase questionnaire-based investigation to determine which characteristics significantly associated with competitive (relative and historical) organisational performance across 1552 organisations in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North- and South-America (de Waal, 2012b). The questionnaire is designed as a "diagnostic" to quantify universal characteristics of a successful organisation in any market the world over (de Waal, 2012a).

When applied as a part of a management improvement framework, the HPO questionnaire has been shown to support long-term organisational success (de Waal, 2017; de Waal and Goedegebuure, 2017). The framework has also been used as a basis for developing high-performance partnerships between organisations (de Waal et al., 2015) and to strengthen the financial resilience of an organisation (de Waal et al., 2019; de Waal et al., 2021).

Therefore, the HPO scale was considered as a useful tool to assess the performance of the case study organisation from the perspective of its employees.

Though the HPO internal assessment does not bear "excellence" in its name, its five factors of *management quality, openness and action orientation, long-term orientation, continuous improvement and renewal*, and *employee quality* (de Waal, 2012a) are comparable to those found in other well-known excellence frameworks. This can be seen by drawing comparisons to the findings of two reviews (Ghicajanu et al., 2015; Muhammad et al., 2020) that looked at the comparability of the United States' Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence (BCPE), the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model, and the Japanese Deming Prize (DP). Both Ghicajanu et al. (2015) and Muhammad et al. (2020) found the BCPE, EFQM, and DP models of excellence to focus on management and leadership qualities, such as management leading through inspiration and integrity. Comparable items in the HPO questionnaire are '*Management has integrity*' and '*Management inspires organizational members to achieve extraordinary results*' (de Waal, 2012a: 27-28).

The excellence frameworks in the reviews also shared elements pertaining to strategic development, such as brand differentiation (Muhammad et al., 2020). A comparable example item in the HPO questionnaire relating to this dimension of excellence is '*The organization has adopted a strategy that sets it clearly apart from other organizations*' (de Waal, 2012a: 28). Another core element that can be found in the excellence frameworks reviewed by Ghicajanu et al. (2015) and Muhammad et al. (2020) is process management and improvement. Comparable items in the HPO questionnaire related to this are '*The organization continuously innovates its products, processes, and services*' and '*In the organization processes are continuously improved*' (de Waal, 2012a: 28). Other comparisons between HPO and the reviewed excellence frameworks include a focus on financial and non-financial results, human resource development, and customer orientation (de Waal, 2012a; Ghicajanu et al., 2015; Muhammad et al., 2020).

It is worth noting that the original validation of the HPO questionnaire relied upon subjective assessments of organisational performance (de Waal, 2012b). This is a commonly adopted practice (e.g., Deshpandé et al., 2004), but it is not free from criticism (Singh et al., 2016). Counter to this criticism, subjective performance measures have, however, been shown to compare well to objective measures (Wall et al., 2004; Singh et al., 2016). Further, even

objective measures have been criticised for their limited ability to define performance (Jing and Avery, 2008). On this nuanced basis, and its consistency with other excellence frameworks, de Waal's (2012a) HPO questionnaire was considered to be an appropriate indicator of organisational performance.

This section of the questionnaire prompted respondents with the following wording: *"As an organisational member, considering the following statements regarding management, please rate on scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree) the extent to which you think each is the case in your organisation"*.

Table 4.3. The HPO scale

HPO factor	Questionnaire item
Management quality	Management is trusted by organisational members
	Management has integrity
	Management is a role model for organisational members
	Management applies fast decision making
	Management applies fast action taking
	Management coaches organisational members to achieve better results
	Management focusses on achieving results
	Management is very effective
	Management applies strong leadership
	Management is confident
	Management always holds organisational members responsible for their results
Openness and action orientation	Management is decisive with regard to non-performers
	Management frequently engages in a dialogue with employees
	Organisational members spend much time on dialogue, knowledge exchange and learning
	Organisational members are always involved in important processes
	Management allows making mistakes
Long-term orientation	Management welcomes change
	The organisation is performance driven
	The organisation maintains good and long-term relationships with all stakeholders
	The organisation is aimed at servicing the customers as best as possible
	Management has been with the company for a long time
Continuous improvement and renewal	New management is promoted from within the organisation
	The organisation is a secure workplace for organisational members
	The organisation has adopted a strategy that sets it clearly apart from other organisations
	In the organisation processes are continuously improved
	In the organisation processes are continuously simplified
	In the organisation processes are continuously aligned
	In the organisation everything that matters to performance is explicitly reported
	In the organisation both financial and non-financial information is reported to organisational members
Quality of employees	The organisation continuously innovates its core competencies
	The organisation continuously innovates its products, processes and services
	Management inspires organisational members to accomplish extraordinary results
	The resilience and flexibility of organisational members is continuously strengthened
	The organisation has a diverse and complementary workforce
	The organisation grows through partnerships with suppliers and/or customers

4.5.2.1.2. High-performance management activity (HPMA)

To fulfil the second purpose of the questionnaire – namely, to identify how management can respond to the performance demands of their organisation via the employee experience – a new scale was developed from the HPO scale by isolating only the items that make a clear, direct reference to (high-performance) management actions.

As Table 4.3 above shows, some items within the HPO scale refer to management character (e.g., *management has integrity*), general organisational ongoings (e.g., *organisational members are always involved in important processes*), or the nature of the organisation (e.g., *the organisation is a secure workplace for organisational members*). However, the focus of the current investigation was on the specific management actions that can actuate positive change within the organisation. Therefore, items that directly refer to management actions (e.g., *management frequently engages in dialogue with employees*) were prioritised.

Drawing on the findings of de Waal (2018) and Mroueh and de Waal (2020), the current study narrows the scope to focus on HPMA as a distinct construct. The comprehensive HPO scale used in their investigations covers a broad array of organisational dimensions, which could dilute the intended measurement of management activity. To address this, 10 out of the original 35 HPO items were chosen for their clear, direct reference to management action by the way that they utilise verbs in their active tense such as “*applies*”, “*coaches*”, “*focuses*”, “*holds*”, “*engages*”, “*allows*”, “*welcomes*”, and “*inspires*”. These are summarised below in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4. The HPMA scale

Variable	Questionnaire item
HPMA1	Management applies fast decision making.
HPMA2	Management applies fast action taking.
HPMA3	Management coaches organisational members to achieve better results.
HPMA4	Management focuses on achieving results.
HPMA5	Management applies strong leadership.
HPMA6	Management always holds organisational members responsible for their results.
HPMA7	Management frequently engages in a dialogue with employees.
HPMA8	Management allows making mistakes.
HPMA9	Management welcomes change.
HPMA10	Management inspires organisational members to accomplish extraordinary results.

Regarding the procedure to isolate only the actions of management from the broader HPO framework, items that imply management actions indirectly, such as '*Management is a role model...*' and '*Management is confident*', were excluded. Although these items may reflect the outcomes of management actions, they do not directly measure the specific actions themselves. For instance, being perceived as a role model is a result of various actions but does not provide explicit information about the actions taken by management to become this. This particular questionnaire item therefore only captures a resultant characteristic derived through perceptions of other actions.

Similarly, items such as '*Management is promoted from within the organisation*' and '*The organisation has a diverse and complementary workforce*' were omitted. These items imply the presence of managerial actions but do not specify what these may be. As statements they operate similarly to those regarding other organisational ongoings, such as '*Organisational members spend much time on dialogue, knowledge exchange, and learning*'. Such items that either make no direct reference to management or are worded indirectly in passive (i.e., *management is promoted...*) or possessive (i.e., *the organisation has a...*) statement forms were excluded to ensure the HPMA measurement model captured the essence of active management behaviour.

4.5.2.1.3. Happiness at work (HAW)

Happiness at work was chosen as an empirical indicator of employee performance alignment based on the premise that an employee's positive experience at work directly correlates with their alignment to organisational goals and performance. This is supported by prior research that has shown happier workers to exhibit higher levels of productivity, produce higher sales, perform better in leadership roles, receive higher performance ratings, and be less likely to take sick days or quit (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Bellet et al., 2024). Furthermore, Salas-Vallina et al. (2017) found a direct positive influence of HAW on employees' motivation to learn, pro-social organisational behaviours, and positive sense of quality of interactions between colleagues. With respect to how management can benefit both the people and performance of their organisation via positive employee experiences, Moss (2023) argues that organisations that prioritise employee happiness see improvements in key performance indicators such as productivity, employee engagement, and retention

rates. While HAW is no guarantee of performance, it is as Pryce-Jones and Lindsay (2014: 130) suggest, representative of 'a mindset which enables action to maximize performance and achieve potential'.

According to Fisher (2010), HAW is an experience that is most effectively measured as a higher-order construct through employee expressions of work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction. Each of these variables could be viewed as reflections of an employee's alignment with their organisation's performance interests, insofar as they indicate the strength and direction of personal '*action tendencies*' in terms of adience and abience or 'approach' and 'avoidance' (Locke, 1970: 490).

For instance, Bakker et al. (2008: 187) define work engagement as 'a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being'. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that more intense positive expressions to this effect have been associated with greater performance outcomes in various studies, as people are more likely to want to engage with work that provides this positive feeling (Kim et al., 2013).

Similarly, while affective organisational commitment may merely be seen as a reflection of an employee's emotional inclination towards an organisation, it is also representative of behaviours that express the attitude (Harrison et al., 2006). Prior research has found that affective organisational commitment is only a weak positive predictor of an employee's task performance (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990), but it has also been shown to negatively associate with absenteeism (Hausknecht et al., 2008) and intention to leave an organisation (Özkan et al., 2020), as well as positively associate with organisational identification (Lee et al., 2015) and willingness to exceed minimal role expectations (Cetin et al., 2015).

Finally, job satisfaction, defined as a positive emotional state that one derives from their job experiences (Locke, 1976), has also been widely evidenced to promote organisational performance through an employee's general orientation towards their work and organisation. Several of the aforementioned studies examining organisational commitment also confirmed statistical associations between job satisfaction and the outcomes of organisational identification (Lee et al., 2015), turnover intention (Özkan et al., 2020), and absenteeism (Hausknecht et al., 2008) in the expected directions. Additionally, economic

analyses by Edmans (2012) and Bakotić (2016) have shown that job satisfaction ultimately raises an organisation's bottom line.

Based on this evidence, employee HAW was measured by Salas-Vallina and Alegre's (2021) shortened HAW (S-HAW) scale. The original HAW scale that was developed upon Fisher's (2010) triad contained 31 items, comprised of Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), Schriesheim and Tsui's (1980) Job Satisfaction scale, and Allen and Mayer's (1990) affective organisational commitment scale. To mitigate survey fatigue and attrition, Salas-Vallina and Alegre (2021) reduced this to 3 items for each sub-construct while retaining comparable statistical power of prediction. These items are shown in Table 4.5, below.

Surveyed work engagement, as measured by the UWES, intends to capture a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterised by the frequency of experience of vigour, dedication, and absorption in work. Responses were prompted with the following wording: *"Considering your happiness at work, on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always) please rate the extent to which you feel the following..."*.

Surveyed affective organisational commitment, as measured by Allen and Mayer's (1990) scale, is indicator of an employee's willingness to remain at, emotional attachment to, and sense of belonging in their organisation. Responses were prompted with the following wording: *"Considering your happiness at work, on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) please rate the extent to which you feel the following..."*.

Finally, surveyed job satisfaction, as measured by Schriesheim and Tsui's (1980) scale, is intended to assess an employee's overall job satisfaction through satisfaction with multiple aspects of the job. Salas-Vallina and Alegre's (2021) S-HAW scale comprises statements referring to one's work, pay, and potential for advancement. Responses were prompted with the following wording: *"Considering your happiness at work, on a scale of 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) please rate the extent to which you feel the following..."*.

Table 4.5. The S-HAW scale

Component	Sub-component	Survey items
Work engagement	Vigour	At my job I feel strong and vigorous
	Dedication	I am enthusiastic about my job
	Absorption	I get carried away when I am working
Organisational commitment	Loyalty	I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation
	Attachment	I feel ‘emotionally attached’ to this organisation
	Belonging	I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organisation
Job satisfaction	Work	I am satisfied with the work I do
	Pay	I am satisfied with the pay I receive for my job
	Advancement	I am satisfied with the opportunities which exist in this organisation for advancement (promotion)

4.5.2.1.4. Positive organisational character (POC)

Positive organisational character (POC) was selected as an empirical indicator of employees’ perceptions of their organisation’s overall character. This construct is based on the premise that an organisation can be perceived as embodying certain character traits that are cultivated through the actions of its representatives (Ashforth et al., 2020). Further to the studies reviewed in the previous chapter that examined POC traits such as ethicality (Ambrose et al., 2021) and virtue (Singh et al., 2018) which resulted in mutual gains for people and performance, POC has also been shown to positively relate to employee expressions of organisational identification, commitment, and satisfaction (Chun, 2005; 2017; Martin, 2021).

The virtue ethical character (VEC) scale originally developed by Chun (2005) was used to measure POC, as it aligns with the notion that virtue represents a form of excellence in organisational character (Ashforth et al., 2020). Virtue, as noted by (Chun, 2017: 872), is ‘a special character trait that is pleasing both to other people and to us’. To this end, akin to the actions that produce it, how employees perceive the overarching positive character of their organisation can provide clear and valuable attention points for management to better understand how the organisation appears as an entity to the employees who interact with it, and the effect that this may have on their general orientation towards it.

The VEC scale prompts respondents to share their impressions of their organisation's character via the extent to which they feel that specific words describe their organisation's character. The decision to use Chun's (2005) scale rather than the one proposed by Cameron et al. (2004), used by Rego et al. (2010) and Singh et al. (2018), was based on how the VEC scale directly captures the overarching character of the organisation rather than broad positively perceived organisational behaviours.

This section of the questionnaire prompted respondents to share their impressions of their organisation's character with the following wording: *"Imagining your organisation as a person, please rate on scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) the extent to which you feel the following words describe your organisation's character"*. The VEC scale is shown below in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6. The VEC scale

Character	Questionnaire item
Integrity	Honest
	Sincere
	Socially-responsible
	Trustworthy
Empathy	Concerned
	Reassuring
	Supportive
	Sympathetic
Courage	Ambitious
	Achievement-oriented
	Leading
	Competent
Warmth	Friendly
	Open
	Pleasant
	Straightforward
Zeal	Exciting
	Innovative
	Imaginative
	Spirited
Conscientiousness	Reliable
	Hardworking
	Proud
	Secure

4.5.2.2. Questionnaire data collection process

All organisational members of Solet were invited to complete an online Qualtrics questionnaire (Appendix B). Qualtrics was chosen as the platform for its clear presentation and user-friendliness, in line with the objective of maximising the quantity and quality of engagement.

The questionnaire was made accessible to all employees of the case organisation for a 3-month period between 16th December 2022 and 15th February 2023. Interested participants accessed the questionnaire via an anonymous hyperlink disseminated through a company-wide e-mail and a Microsoft Teams channel to which all staff had access. The hyperlink was adjoined by a description of the investigation, and this information was also shown on the opening page. All potential participants were able to view a copy of the full participant information sheet (PIS, Appendix C) as a PDF file accessed via a hyperlink on the opening page of the questionnaire. The organisation-investigation liaison (the Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive Officer, CEO) performed the original broadcast and followed up with periodic reminders. Other organisational members promoted the questionnaire at their discretion. For the purpose of safeguarding and to maximise the quantity (confidence) and quality (honesty) of responses, potential participants were ensured that their participation was entirely voluntary and confidential (anonymous), and that the investigation was fully independent of their organisation. Participants were asked to give honest responses and were ensured that there could be no right or wrong answers, only what they felt. Furthermore, there were no compulsory fields. Participants were also made aware on the opening page that they were providing informed consent by filling out the questionnaire.

In total, the questionnaire comprised 6 pages. The opening page provided information about the investigation and participation. On the next page, participants could provide their first name, last name, age, gender, tenure, probation status, and full-/part-time working status. The subsequent three pages respectively collected data on employees' perceptions of their organisation's internal performance using de Waal's (2012b) HPO scale, perceptions of their organisation's character using Chun's (2005) organisational VEC scale, and expressions of their work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction using Salas-Vallina and Alegre's (2021) S-HAW scale.

The questionnaire was programmed to randomise the order that the above three pages appeared for every participant to reduce the potential for ordering effects. On the final page, participants could indicate their level of management (according to the definitions presented in Table 4.7, below), state the duration that it took them to complete the questionnaire⁶, express their interest in participating in a research interview (and provide an email contact for this), and provide any other comments/questions in an open text field.

Table 4.7. Management levels

Level	Response option
0	I am not a line-manager (nobody directly reports to me)
1	Level 1 line-manager (at least one 'non-manager' directly reports to me)
2	Level 2 line-manager (at least one 'Level 1' manager directly reports to me)
3	Level 3 line-manager, or above (at least one 'Level 2' manager, or above, directly reports to me)

The system of recording management levels as shown in Table 4.7 was adopted in lieu of descriptive terms such as “Supervisors” and “Senior Managers” (e.g., Martin, 2021). This was decided on the basis that such terms may be inconsistent with people’s official or understood managerial status; a “Team Leader” or “Manager”, for example, may not define themselves as a “Supervisor”, *per se*. Further, the title “Senior Manager” may be interpreted differently by different people based on what they feel constitutes seniority. As this investigation focuses on management, a single consistent term (line-manager) was used alongside descriptions regarding one’s “direct reports” or lack thereof.

4.5.2.3. Questionnaire data analysis process

For the purpose of providing an internal measure of organisational performance, the scores given by the responding employees to the full HPO scale were first averaged per item, and

⁶The reason for this is explained on the questionnaire’s opening page. As this study involves themes of collaboration and good-will on the part of organisations and their people, it seemed inappropriate to offer participants a direct reward (especially when the organisation was already affording them the time to engage with the investigation). Accordingly, in line with a “pay it forward” principle, participants were informed that the Principal Investigator would volunteer for the duration that they stated it took them to complete the questionnaire.

then averaged per HPO factor (i.e., *management quality, openness and action orientation, long-term orientation, continuous improvement and renewal, and employee quality*). As it was optional to respond to any item on the questionnaire, the number of observations informing the average score of each item ranged between (n) 184 and 188. These data are presented in the next chapter (Chapter 5).

For the purpose of assessing the hypothesised relationships between HPMA, POC, and HAW, the statistical methods of PLS-SEM and importance-performance map analysis (IPMA) were applied. SmartPLS 4 software (Ringle et al., 2024) was used for these analyses. IBM SPSS version 29 (IBM Corporation, 2023) was also used to assess the survey sample in terms of descriptive statistics, normality of distribution, the presence of outliers, and to perform principal component analysis (PCA) on Chun's (2005) VEC scale after issues of discriminant validity were discovered. Monte Carlo PCA for Parallel Analysis software (Watkins, 2000) was also used in the PCA process to generate random comparative eigenvalues. Microsoft Excel was also used to ascertain which questionnaire responses were sufficiently complete for PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2022) and to assess the presence of "straightlining" in the sample (where respondents give identical responses across numerous items, potentially indicating disengagement). Further information is provided below regarding the analytical procedures adopted, while the results of the analyses are presented in Chapter 6.

4.5.2.3.1. Preliminary analyses

Preliminary analyses included *a priori* power analysis to determine the minimum sample size required for the study (Kock and Hadaya, 2018), data screening and cleaning to ensure each survey response was $\geq 85\%$ complete and each item of a construct was $> 95\%$ complete (Hair et al., 2022), an assessment of outliers (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013), an analysis of the data's normality (Pallant, 2020), and a casewise standard deviation check to identify instances of straightlining.

An exclusion criterion was set to remove responses from employees in their probationary period if their perceptions of the organisation differed significantly from those beyond this period. A Mann-Whitney-U test confirmed no significant difference between these groups ($p > 0.05$) in their perceptions of overall HPMA or POC. Therefore, all responses meeting the

aforementioned completion criteria were retained ($n = 184$). Additionally, a further Man-Whitney-U test found no significant difference between full- and part-time working status, and a Kruskal-Wallis test found no significant differences between (non-)managerial levels ($p > 0.05$). The descriptive statistics for the statistical survey sample are presented in Table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8. Descriptive statistics for the questionnaire survey sample

Descriptor	Range (in years)	Mean (SD)	<i>n</i>
Age	18.00-65.00	37.47 (12.06)	181
Tenure	0.13-22.50	3.94 (4.04)	181
Percentage			
Gender			
Female		62.30	114
Male		36.60	67
Prefer not to say		1.10	2
	Total	100	183
Management Structure			
Level 0 (non-manager)		65.00	119
Level 1 (manager of all non-managers)		23.00	42
Level 2 (manager of at least one level 1 manager)		7.10	13
Level 3 (manager of at least one level 2 manager)		4.90	9
	Total	100	183
Introductory probation period			
Yes		3.30	6
No		96.20	176
	Total	100	182
Hours			
Full-time		92.90	170
Part-time		6.60	12
	Total	100	182

4.5.2.3.2. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM)

Partial least squares structural equation modelling was employed to examine the theorised effect of perceived HPMA on employee HAW, and to explore the role of perceived POC in this proposed causal relationship. The PLS-SEM approach, with its causal-predictive orientation (Jöreskog and Wold, 1982), is particularly suitable for management research as it aims to maximise the explained variance of dependent variables, and can thereby provide valuable information for management strategy.

All latent variables in the model were modelled reflectively. This decision was based on the theoretical understanding that subjective, questionnaire-derived indicators are manifestations (reflections) of the variance in the unobserved, intangible theoretical construct that they represent (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The decision was supported by the finding that the items within each construct were highly correlated, which suggests that they share a common theme and are generally exchangeable (Medina-Garrido et al., 2021).

The analysis followed the recommended procedure for the use and reporting of PLS-SEM as detailed by Hair et al. (2019). Additionally, Sarstedt et al.'s (2019) procedure for specifying, estimating, and validating reflective-reflective higher-order constructs was applied to HAW. This approach aligns with Fisher's (2010) original conceptualisation of the construct, which considers work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction as reflections of HAW.

This process began with the evaluation of the measurement models, which involved a series of assessments of indicator communality and construct reliability and validity. Outer loadings were examined to determine the strength of the relationships between indicators and their associated latent variables. Construct reliability and validity were further evaluated through composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE). Thereafter, discriminant validity was assessed to confirm that the constructs were distinct from each other, as based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio.

Following the evaluation of the measurement models, the structural model was assessed. This included an examination of collinearity to check for potential multicollinearity issues among predictor constructs. The significance and relevance of structural model relationships were then evaluated, focusing on direct effects as well as indirect and total effects of HPMA on HAW. The model's explanatory power (in-sample predictive ability) was determined by measuring the coefficient of determination (R^2), which indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variables explained by predecessor variables, and the effect size (f^2), which assesses the magnitude of impact of predictor constructs on dependent constructs. Additionally, the model's predictive power (out-of-sample predictive ability) was evaluated using $PLS_{predict}$, which assesses the predictive accuracy of the model for new data, and the cross-validated predictive ability test (CVPAT), which evaluates the model's generalisability.

The PLS-SEM approach to modelling is perhaps best described as “soft” and exploratory (Wold, 1982). This approach demonstrated itself to be particularly valuable in this investigation when the initial attempt to revalidate Chun’s (2005) VEC model in its original form was unsuccessful – an issue which Martin (2021) also appears to have encountered when using the measurement model in their PLS-SEM analyses. The challenge that this posed and the adaptive process to resolve it led to the development of two novel subconstructs of POC – namely, *aspirational* POC (POC-A) and *relational* POC (POC-R) – which revealed intriguing mediating relationships consistent with the egological view of employee experience.

The importance of explicating this occurrence in the modelling process is because while it may not be common to see in published research reports, it is a more truthful representation of what actually takes place in the process of SEM. Indeed, two insightful comments made by the creator of the PLS-SEM approach illustrate this:

Hence soft modelling is an evolutionary process. At the outset the arrow scheme of a soft model is more or less tentative. The investigator uses the first design to squeeze fresh knowledge from the data, thereby putting flesh on the bones of the model, getting indications for modifications and improvements, and gradually consolidating the design (Wold, 1982: 29).

A PLS model develops by a dialogue between the investigator and the computer. Tentative improvements of the model – such as the introduction of a new latent variable, an indicator or an inner relation, or the omission of such an element – are tested for predictive relevance (Wold, 1985: 590).

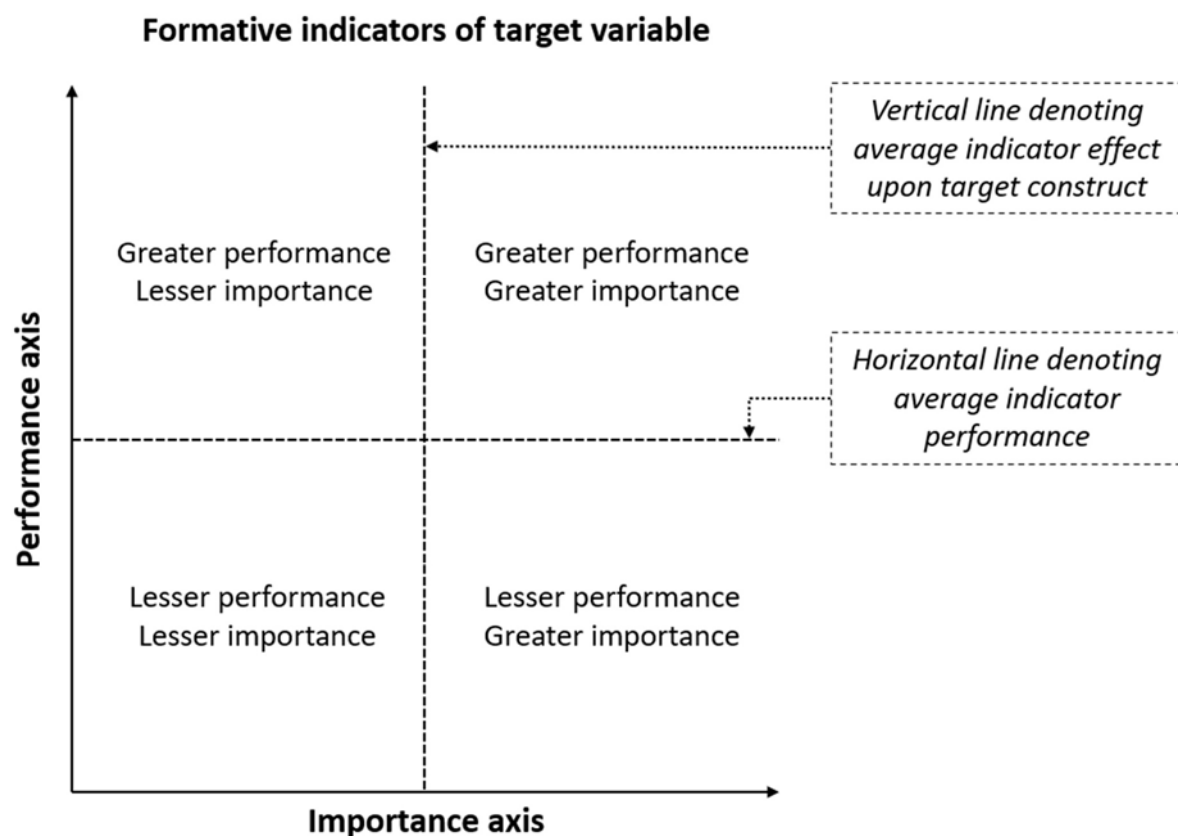
In line with Wold’s approach to statistical modelling, the process reported in Chapter 6 can therefore be considered both *confirmatory* to the extent that it involved the testing of hypotheses formed upon extant theory and *exploratory* in the way that it identified patterns in the data that were not formerly hypothesised. The following subsection details a further exploratory statistical technique that was used in the analyses: IPMA.

4.5.2.3.3. Importance-performance map analysis (IPMA)

Importance-performance map analysis was performed to enhance the insights derived from the PLS-SEM results. This analysis extends the traditional PLS-SEM analysis by considering

both the importance (total effects) and performance (average values) of each construct (Ringle and Sarstedt, 2016). This dual perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of key areas that require managerial attention and improvement. The results of IPMA can guide strategic decision-making and resource allocation by identifying the impact of specific variables on a target construct, while also providing a snapshot of current performance in each dimension. Figure 4.3 below shows the key aspects of an IPMA output.

Figure 4.3. A diagram showing quadrants of an IPMA separated by lines denoting average indicator performance and importance with respect to a target construct



4.5.3. Employee interviews

4.5.3.1. Purposes of the interviews

The employee interviews were the most diversely drawn upon element of this investigation. Interview data feature to varying degrees in all four results chapters (Chapters 5-8). In the documentary evidence of the paradox in Solet (Chapter 5), a memory recalled by an employee during their interview is presented as an example of how managerial actions can

have potentially simultaneous positive and negative (paradoxical) effects upon those witness to them. The interview data were also harnessed in combination with principal component analysis (PCA) to reestablish the construct of POC for PLS-SEM (Chapter 6). The interview data were also used to explore the interviewees' personal reasons for coming to and staying at their organisation (RQ2, Chapter 7) and to understand what managerial actions could be said to be essential for working through the performance management paradox (RQ3, Chapter 8).

4.5.3.2. Interview data collection process

Interview data were collected from 25 employees who registered on the questionnaire their interest in sharing more of their views in a research interview. They were a mix of managers (36%) and non-managers (64%). Among them, 68% identified as female and 32% as male. Ages ranged from 23 to 65 with a mean of 37.56 years. Time at the company ranged from 5 months to 20 years with a mean tenure of 4.05 years. The vast majority (96%) were full-time members of staff. No specific criteria influenced the selection process other than participant willingness and ability to partake in an interview. The cohort offered a comprehensive view of work life from the perspective of a meld of colleagues at a single organisation.

The interviewees also appeared to be a reasonably representative subset of the survey sample. The split between managers and non-managers was very similar (survey sample: 35% managers; 65% non-managers), the proportion identifying as male and female were also similar (survey sample: 62.3% female; 36.6% male), the mean ages were almost identical and comprised a similar range (survey sample: mean 37.47; range 18-65 years), and the mean tenure was also comparable (survey sample: 3.94 years). A Mann-Whitney-U test also revealed that there was no significant difference between interviewed and non-interviewed employees with regards to their views of the organisation in terms of HPO and POC or their work engagement or job satisfaction ($p > 0.05$). The interviewee cohort were, however, significantly more committed to the organisation than the non-interviewed cohort ($p < 0.05$).

While interviewees were entirely welcome to provide specific information pertaining to their roles, by design the interviews were not structured to gather this information. This feature

of the interviews was purposeful. These were conversations between two people about life and work on the basis that people live in the world first and foremost and work in that life(world) only thereafter (Heidegger, 1962). Theorisation in this way could attend to *the person who works*, rather than only seeing their being in the pigeonhole of a worker.

Interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams. This was influenced by the recency of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time, but it was also considered beneficial on the basis of the organisation and its members being accustomed to this form of communication. It also made it easier to acquire a larger and possibly more diverse sample by removing barriers, as some interviewees were at home or working in various locations around the UK.

4.5.3.2.1. Interview structure and questions

The interviews followed a semi-structured design of a confidential conversation between an interviewee and an interviewer. This conversation was guided by a short set of open-ended questions to explore the interviewees' experiences of work and being in their organisation. Interviews ranged in duration from 12 minutes and 52 seconds to 80 minutes and 30 seconds with the mean duration being 30 minutes and 58 seconds.

A semi-structured approach was taken to provide a consistent framework that permitted the exploration of possible themes on the research topic while also allowing the conversations to meander as they flowed. Interviewees were also free to ask their own questions at any stage before, during, or after the interviews. The audio of the interviews was recorded so that verbatim transcriptions could be created for analysis. To ensure that interviewees felt as comfortable as possible to speak their mind, they were assured in the PIS and at the beginning of the interviews that their personal and identifying information would be kept confidential and their responses anonymised through pseudonymisation and care not to report comments attributable to their person.

Following general greetings and light chit-chat to help interviewees feel at ease, the interviews commenced with a scripted introduction that explained the planned format which would guide the dialogue. This introduction ensured that interviewees were aware of the reason for the interview and were content with it being recorded for the purpose of data transcription and analysis. It was at this stage that interviewees were reminded that

everything that would be said would be kept strictly confidential, that they would be entirely anonymous, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point. Interviewees were also asked at this point if they had any questions and if they were happy to begin. Following the preplanned questions, interviewees were thanked for their contribution and offered another opportunity to ask further questions or add anything else.

The preplanned questions of the interviews fell into two primary sections. These were a *personal* question section, and a *hypothetical* question section, each of which was explicitly stated to the interviewee at the start of the *personal* question section and at the transition to the *hypothetical* question section. The questions are shown in Table 4.9 below and the interview schedule can be found in Appendix D.

Table 4.9. Semi-structured interview questions

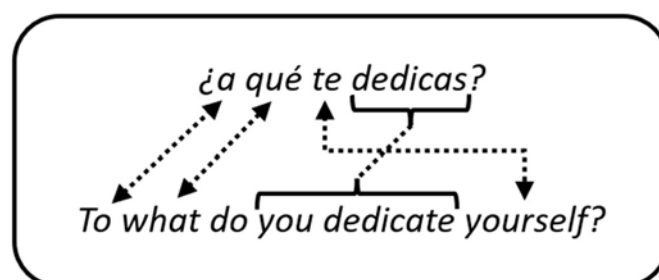
Section	Question
Personal	<i>In its most general sense in life, why do you do what you do?</i>
	<i>Why do you work for your organisation?</i>
	<i>On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with your job?</i>
	<i>Why that number?</i>
Hypothetical	<i>What would you say leads to optimal worker productivity?</i>
	<i>What would you say leads to optimal worker happiness?</i>
	<i>What would you say prevents optimal worker productivity?</i>
	<i>What would you say prevents optimal worker happiness?</i>

The purpose of the *personal* question section was to explore the interviewees reasons for being in their organisation. Cued first by an introductory question, “*in its most general sense in life, why do you do what you do?*”, interviewees were subsequently asked, “*why do you work for your organisation?*”. Regarding the nature of responses to the opening question, some interviewees went straight into considerations of why they do what they do in life in general, while others automatically framed their responses by the context of work. Some others naturally began to discuss their being and time with Solet, while yet others first sought clarity as to whether this first question pertained to work or wider life. Where this query was raised, interviewees were simply reminded that they were free to consider the

question however they liked; from this prompt, these interviewees began without hesitation to share whatever came to the light of mind.

The reason for asking why the interviewees worked for their organisation was to gather theoretical insights into why people engage with and commit themselves to their organisation. In the English language, it is difficult to grasp the importance of such a simple question. To illustrate this point, the question *“what do you do?”* in the context of work, when asked in Spanish, has a far more poignant connotation: *“¿a qué te dedicas?”*. Transliterated, this question asks, *“to what do you dedicate yourself?”* (Figure 4.4). This is what the two-part line of questioning *“why do you do what you do?”* and *“why do you work for your organisation?”* was intended to capture: *why do employees come to, stay at, and leave their organisation?* (RQ2). In other words, *why do they dedicate a part of themselves to one organisation rather than another?*

Figure 4.4. The transliteration of the question *“what do you do?”* from Spanish to English



Following the responses to the first two planned questions, interviewees were then asked, *“on a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with your job?”*. The numbers given by interviewees to this close-ended question was not of primary interest for analysis; rather, what was of greater interest was their in-depth responses to the open-ended question that followed: *“why that number?”*. Some interviewees gave positive reasons as to why it was as high as it was (e.g., 8 out of 10 because...), while others focused on reasons why it was not higher (e.g., *not* 10 out of 10 because...). Some interviewees gave balanced responses of positives and negatives naturally. Where relevant, interviewees were prompted with follow-up questions designed to elicit this balance of perspective.

The reason for asking about job satisfaction in the interviews was because the literature review showed how important job satisfaction appears to be to both management research and practice. Various studies captured within the systematic search considered job satisfaction to be an important variable for both an organisation's people and performance (e.g., Salas-Vallina et al., 2020; Samad et al., 2022). Upon this basis, the current investigation included job satisfaction as a talking point – not to examine what brings people job satisfaction in and of itself, but rather to explore what brings them to work for a given organisation.

Following the above four questions of the *personal* question section, the interviewees were informed that the next set of questions were of a more *hypothetical* nature, designed to gather their thoughts on what would lead to optimal worker productivity and optimal worker happiness. The questions, “*what would you say leads to optimal worker productivity?*” and “*what would you say leads to optimal worker happiness?*” were asked in turn, followed by the inverse questions, “*what would you say prevents optimal worker productivity?*” and “*what would you say prevents optimal worker happiness?*”.

The purpose of asking these four questions in this way was to cover the same topic area in a positive and negative light in order to increase the potential of achieving conceptual saturation. The terms “happiness” and “productivity” were chosen on the basis that, in their broadest sense, they represent the ultimate outcomes for people and performance, respectively, and are potentially contradictory. This line of questioning also followed the evidence in the reviewed literature that organisations could not achieve optimal productivity from their less happy workers due to counterproductive reaction formation (Lewis and Smith, 2014). Accordingly, it was deemed valuable to gather from the interviewees, as contributing members of their organisation, what they thought positively and negatively influenced these highly sought-after states.

4.5.3.3. Interview data analysis process

As already mentioned, the interview data were used in some form in all four results chapters. While all analyses fall under the umbrella of “thematic analysis” (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Gill, 2014), they differ somewhat in their approach. The first method, reported in the next chapter (Chapter 5), involved identifying an “exemplar” from the interview data that

was particularly illustrative of the potential for managers to create paradox through their performance management-related actions. As Gill (2014: 125) suggests, this entails taking ‘salient excerpts of stories or instances that characterize specific common themes or meanings across informants’. In line with the underlying idea that paradoxicality can emerge from the ‘multiplicity of views’ regarding managerial action (Smith and Lewis, 2011: 390), rather than focusing on common experience as Gill (2014) suggests, the exemplified story shared by an interviewee was chosen to illustrate how the people in it might have responded to their experience of the manager’s actions in opposing ways.

The second way the interview data were harnessed was through the method of deductive semantic analysis for the purpose of revalidating Chun’s (2005) VEC scale after issues of discriminant validity were discovered. The deductive approach in Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis involves coding data according to specific themes predetermined by theory, while the semantic element narrows the scope to only what participants have explicitly stated. In the current research, this entailed coding only direct references to any of the 24 items of Chun’s (2005) VEC scale, which provided a refined set of 17 POC traits that were then subject to PCA.

The third way that the interview data were analysed was by way of “reflexive” thematic analysis, which Braun and Clarke (2019: 592) suggest blends semantic and latent and inductive and deductive (i.e. abductive) coding to draw out themes – ‘stories about particular patterns of shared meaning’ – from qualitative data. This method was used to address the second and third research questions of this investigation. The analytic approach was guided by the six-phase process first described in Braun and Clarke’s (2006: 594) paper, chosen for its appropriateness for “developing’, ‘constructing’ or ‘generating” theory from data in exploratory research. The six phases of analysis are explained below.

Familiarisation and initial ideas forming (phase 1) naturally developed from the point of conducting the interviews and the noting down of initial ideas. This process continued through the act of transcription, the re-reading of transcripts, and re-listening to the recorded interview audio.

Following the transcription of all interviews, the data were collated into a single master document with all responses structured under each respective question. This document was

imported into NVivo coding software (Version 15.0.0). Initial features (codes) within the data relevant to the research problem were identified (phase 2). Thereafter, these codes were arranged into themes using parent structures (phase 3). As inferences progressively accumulated and crystalised through the analysis of different interviews, where a theme appeared to gain prominence, previous transcripts were revisited to see where further presence of it may have been previously 'invisible' (Eakin and Gladstone, 2020: 7). It was during this phase that visual mapping of the themes and their interrelations began (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This fluidly developed into the refinement of themes (phase 4) by reviewing the coded extracts within their attributed theme and whether the themes collectively constituted an accurate representation of the overall dataset. After this, the final two presentation phases of the analysis commenced, starting with the process of finalising the names of the themes by collating their respective extracts into a narrative structure (phase 5) and continuing thereafter in the production of the report (phase 6).

Thematic analysis was applied in its traditional or "raw" form to explore the underlying factors influencing employees' decisions to work for their current organisation, by drawing on interviewees' responses to the personal questions. However, to elicit the essential elements for mastering the performance management paradox, an additional dimension of thought experimentation (Aguinis et al., 2023; Gardner, 2023) was incorporated into the analysis of the hypothetical questions. This additional dimension is expanded upon in the following subsection.

4.5.3.3.1. Thought experimentation

Thought experimentation is a process of harnessing 'disciplined imagination' (Weick, 1989: 516). As Van Bockhaven and Matthyssens (2017: 71) note, at the heart of a thought experiment is 'an abstract hypothetical scenario that allows for theorising based on disciplined imaginative reasoning'. This hypothetical scenario is used to 'bridge the gap between the abstract and the concrete' (Folger and Turillo, 1999: 742). In the current thesis, the abstract hypothetical scenario is the paradoxical one which seemingly cannot be sustained: *the scenario in which management can maintain optimal conditions for both the people and performance of their organisation, wherein all employees are perfectly satisfied*

with their jobs, fully engaged with their work, wholeheartedly committed to their organisation, and thus given to performance.

In accordance with Aguinis et al.'s (2023: 4) typology for thought experiments in organisational studies, this entailed contemplating an 'imaginary' paradoxical scenario 'in an attempt to disconfirm a more developed theory'. Posed as a 'utopian thought' (Aguinis et al., 2023: 8) in contrast to the accepted status quo that counterproductive organisational dynamics resulting from adverse employee experiences cannot be outright eradicated through management (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Cunha and Putnam, 2019), the objective of trailing this thought with the interviewees of this investigation was to envision what would be needed to attain this hypothetical ideal.

This particular approach resonates with Kuhn's (1964: 263) view on the use of this scientific method, where he comments that 'thought experiment is one of the essential analytical tools which are employed during crisis and which then help to promote basic conceptual reform'. The performance management paradox inherently entails a form of crisis. Organisations seek optimally productive employees, who simultaneously strive for optimal happiness. However, progress in either direction is hindered when these goals clash, leading to negative consequences for both people and performance.

Despite thought experimentation having led to monumental theoretical breakthroughs throughout history, triggering seismic shifts in scientific thinking⁷, Aguinis et al. (2023: 2) found them to be 'virtually absent' from organisation and management research. In their review, the authors recall how giants of science changed the course of their field with a thought *almost* beyond belief – beyond belief at the time, that is, but foundational knowledge now (Aguinis et al., 2023). It is therefore equally important as it is intriguing to consider what could emerge in the world of management by way of thought experimentation.

As Aguinis et al. (2023) suggest, thought experiments open scientific exploration to the possibility of revealing information that may otherwise remain obscure to other means of inference that conform to conventional wisdom. In line with the work of Hatherly et al.

⁷ Aguinis et al. (2023) exemplify Galileo's Leaning Tower, Newton's Cannonball, Einstein's Beam of Light, and Schrödinger's Cat.

(2020) and Smith (2007: 478), thought experimentation was used in this investigation to elicit insights that could ‘impact on the practical dimensions of the work of a manager’ by focusing on a seemingly insoluble organisational issue in a contemporary working context.

Although at its abstract level of theorisation thought experimentation occurs in ‘the laboratory of the mind’ (Aguinis et al., 2023: 3), this does not preclude the use of data to strengthen, ground, and enrich its process and findings. That is, ‘while thought experiments do not create empirical data, data can be used to inform thought experiments’, as this provides ‘lived experiences to enhance realism’ (Aguinis et al., 2023: 8). Therefore, in a similar fashion to Van Bockhaven and Matthyssens (2017), the current investigation engaged in what could be described as an *empirically informed* thought experiment, whereby fieldwork grounded the theorisation. The results of this thought experiment are presented in Chapter 8.

4.6. Ethical considerations

Ethics in research concerns the important matter of the appropriateness of researchers’ behaviour in relation to the people who are affected by the research (Saunders and Lewis, 2018). As Thomas (2022: 38) suggests, ‘being *ethical*’ in research entails a care for participants, oneself as the researcher, and the integrity of the research itself. To uphold these three elements of research ethics, this study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines set by the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) Research and Governance Ethics Committee and the terms of ethical approval agreed through the University’s EthOS application process. The following practical considerations were integrated into the investigatory process.

Prior to their involvement in the study, all participants were provided with detailed information about the aim, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the research in the form of a PIS (Appendix 3). They were informed at the point of engagement with the questionnaire and in the introductory segment of the interviews of their right to request withdrawal from the study at any time without reason or repercussion. Survey participants were informed that they were providing consent by submitting their survey, while informed consent was obtained from interview participants through the Interview Consent Form

(Appendix E) and clear verbal verification of voluntary participation at the beginning of the interviews. These means ensured that participants had ample opportunity to understand their involvement in the study.

To safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, in accordance with the UK Data Service (2022) recommendations, all data were anonymised at the earliest opportunity by removing personal identifying information and ensuring that individual responses could not be traced back to specific participants. Participant confidentiality was also protected by securely storing potentially identifiable data on the Principal Investigator's MMU OneDrive account, accessible only to approved research personnel via password-protected computers and accounts. Further, data were only handled using software approved in the Protocol.

Furthermore, every effort was made to minimise potential harm to participants. The broad nature of the topic did not directly intend to elicit emotionally challenging talking points, but potentially distressing themes did emerge in the process of open conversation during the interviews (e.g., the loss of loved ones and previous traumatic working experiences). To mitigate the discomfort that the unearthing of these memories may have caused, the interviewer felt it important to make it clear in the moment that the interviewees were not expected to talk about them if they did not wish to, but that they were free to speak their mind if they did. This effort to ensure that all participants (both questionnaire and interview) were under no pressure to provide information against their will aligned with Saunders and Lewis' (2018) principle of "*consent – not coercion*". Finally, in case participants had any concerns or queries, the PIS provided the contact details of the Principal Investigator, Research Supervisors, Faculty Head of Research Ethics and Governance, MMU Data Protection Officer, and the UK Information Commissioner's Office.

4.7. Outline of the results chapters

The following four chapters present the empirical findings. Chapter 5 provides in-depth documentary evidence of the case organisation, Solet, which offers a real-world instantiation of the performance management paradox and rich contextual detail for subsequent analyses. Thereafter, to address the question of how management can simultaneously serve the people and performance of their organisation (RQ1), Chapter 6 presents the statistical

analyses that examine the relationship between employees' perceptions of HPMA and their HAW, as well as the mediating role of perceived POC. Following this, Chapter 7 transitions to the qualitative exploration of the interviewees' rationales for working for Solet (RQ2). This chapter develops a model of practical, personal, and relational "forces" that employees experience and which influence their decisions to come to, stay at, and leave an organisation. Finally, Chapter 8 presents the thought experimental findings, which form a framework of essential managerial actions for working through the performance management paradox (RQ3).

Chapter 5. Results 1 – Documentary evidence of the performance management paradox in Solet: etic and emic perspectives

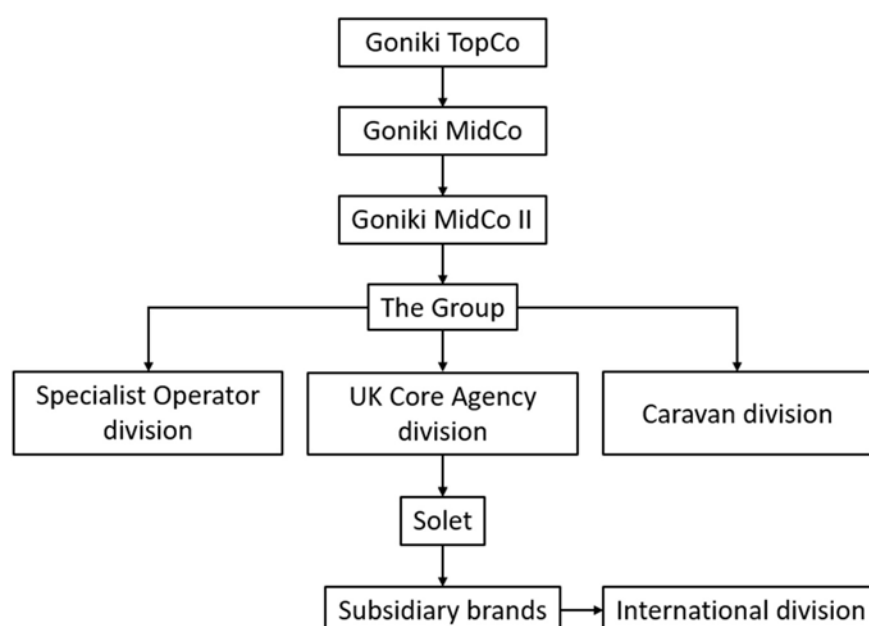
So far in this thesis, the performance management paradox has only been discussed in theory. This chapter reveals an instance of the paradox in a real-world context of a single organisation attempting to excel at what it does through the shared enterprise of all its people. While the idiographic instance of this single case will possess a certain degree of configurational uniqueness that inevitably limits the extent to which findings can be drawn from it into other organisational contexts (Tsoukas, 2017), it is nevertheless maintained that richer insights can be gained from employees' experiences after first illuminating the milieu in which they work.

After a brief overview of Solet, this chapter examines the latent priming conditions for the performance management paradox in Solet's case through an analysis of various publicly available documents published by the company and relevant related organisations (e.g., those to which Solet has pledged support or from which it has received endorsement). Thereafter, attention turns to how well the company seems to be performing amid this paradoxical context. This is first demonstrated through a historical overview of its growth and financial performance. A complementary internal assessment of organisational performance is then offered from the emic experience of its employees, as shown through the HPO diagnostic assessment (de Waal, 2012a). The final section then returns to the potential for paradox to emerge in performance management, this time demonstrated through particularly illustrative personal accounts of a select few surveyed and interviewed employees of Solet. These excerpts are chosen for the way that they offer a glimpse into the complexity of pleasing all people in the process of organising, but also the importance of noticing where employee discontentment can breed antipathy, which can cue consideration of how this could be evaded. This chapter raises the importance of studying the employee experience to enrich understanding of how managers can minimise adverse effects of the organisation's performance mandate and capitalise on the potential of positive employee experiences.

5.1. A brief overview of Solet

Solet's life began in 1991 as a humble mother-and-son business in the North of England. It has since grown into a market-leading, technology-driven staycation accommodation provider operating predominantly in the UK. Now only with the legacy of its family origins since the resignation of its Founder in 2019, it continues to be a year-on-year profitable, private equity-backed business that, at the time of this investigation, has brought 26 'sister' brands into the Solet 'family' (Solet, 2023a: online). Since its most recent transfer of ownership to a prominent investment partner in the travel sector, Solet and its subsidiary sister brands have been designated by its directorship as the 'UK Core Agency division' within a Group corporate structure that is controlled by a 3-tiered hierarchy of parent companies (pseudonymised as Goniki TopCo, MidCo, and MidCo II) and which contains also an 'International division', 'Specialist Operator division', and 'Caravan division' (Goniki TopCo, 2023: 6). At the time of data collection, Solet's CEO and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) were also the registered serving directors of all other companies within the corporate structure, including the ultimate controlling company (Goniki TopCo) and directly and indirectly held subsidiaries. This corporate structure is presented in Figure 5.1 as an organogram.

Figure 5.1. The corporate structure of Solet and associated companies



As can be seen in Figure 5.1, the ‘International division’ spurs from Solet’s subsidiary level. This division comprises two indirectly held subsidiaries in New Zealand. For clarification purposes, this investigation focused only on the UK Core Agency division. The next section turns to the latent potential for the performance management paradox in the case of Solet.

5.2. The latent priming conditions for paradox in Solet

As case study research emphasises the importance of documenting a phenomenon within a real-world example of it (Yin, 2014), this section explores how Solet operates amid a latent tension between its interdependent obligations to its people and performance. This is first illustrated by public statements made in official company documentation that either (1) bares the names (and sometimes signatures) of the CEO or CFO serving at the time of investigation or (2) can be reasonably assumed to have been approved by them in their positions of authority within the organisation. Thereafter, this tension is further exemplified through the company’s various social initiatives, which demonstrate its ongoing negotiation between corporate interests and the employee experience.

These documents and the locations from which they were obtained, along with their respective citations used in this chapter are presented in Table 4.1 in Section 4.5.1.2 of the previous chapter.

5.2.1. The written word of Solet’s directors

Alike many other organisations in the world, Solet is a company that exhibits itself as an ambitious, striving, and competitive collaborative entity. Declarations such as ‘[w]e believe in... a commitment to excellence’ and ‘[o]ur aim is to become the number one provider’ (Solet, 2023a: online) are present for the public to see. While they are commonplace (Chun, 2005; Ashforth et al., 2020), simple statements of a shared belief and an unwavering intention of the collective – as implied by the words “we” and “our” – can mask paradoxical tensions within the process of managing the many people that make the organisation an “us”.

To some extent, Solet’s directors acknowledge this issue in their Strategic Report. While the above expressions possess first-person plural pronouns to create a sense of unitary ambition, in the Report, the directors state that ‘[i]t is not always possible to provide positive outcomes for all stakeholders...’ and continue by asserting that ‘...the Board is mindful when making decisions based on the competing priorities of stakeholders’ (Solet, 2023b: 7).

The directors list their key stakeholders as ‘Guests’, ‘Property Owners’, ‘Workforce’, ‘Suppliers’, ‘Community and Environment’, and ‘Shareholders and lenders’ (Solet, 2023b: 8). And it is at the interface of these interdependent stakeholders’ priorities that collective organisational pronouns such as “we” and “our” (and “us”) in reference to people who make the organisation what it is can begin to show signs of stress. From a systems perspective, diverging interests in multistakeholder operations inherently form tensions, which give rise to the negative dynamics of the performance management paradox (Smith and Lewis, 2011). As shown in the following two subsections, the potential for these negative dynamics to take hold within Solet can be seen in a selection of interrelated and potentially inconsistent statements made in several publicly available company documents.

5.2.1.1. Paradoxical priorities

In Solet’s social and environmental Impact Report 2022, it is stated that ‘[i]t is our top priority to ensure the wellbeing of our people’ (Solet, 2022: 22), with the key detail here being that this is the organisation’s *top* priority – “our” top priority. As the sentence in question continues in reference to work⁸, there is no ambiguity that “our people” refers to Solet’s employees. However, the veracity of the claim that employee well-being is the organisation’s *top* priority is questionable.

The organisation is, after all, a privately-owned capitalist enterprise with the ‘ultimate controlling party’ of its ‘ultimate parent company’ (Goniki TopCo) being a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) (Solet, 2023b: 8). Further, while all levels of the organisation from Solet up to Goniki MidCo are registered in the UK, anomalously, Goniki TopCo is registered overseas in Jersey. It may therefore not be naïve to suggest that the top priority of the ultimate

⁸ The full sentence reads: “It is our top priority to ensure the wellbeing of our people, and we realise that work is only one part of a full life”.

controlling party of Solet is to make as much money as possible, *not* to ensure the well-being of its people.

The company's socially desirable declared top priority is further brought into question when the legal obligations of the directors to the company's effectively anonymous *de jure* owners are combined with a related financial statement that directly refers to employees. Within Solet's Directors' Responsibilities Statement, it is written that '[t]he Directors... have general responsibility for taking such steps as are reasonably open to them to safeguard the assets of the Company' (Solet, 2023b: 13), which naturally includes the investors' financial assets. Further on in the same document, in the 'Notes to the Financial Statements', it is written that '[a] liability is recognised for benefits accruing to employees in respect of wages and salaries, annual leave and sick leave' (Solet, 2023b: 26). In between the lines of these statements, Solet's directors are acknowledging their professional obligation to limit liabilities (i.e., wages/salaries, annual leave, and sick leave) that are directly related to their purported *top* priority of ensuring their people's well-being.

As the element of continuity in paradox theory suggests, safeguarding the company's financial assets essentially includes a persistent pressure to avoid trading excessive amounts of investors' funds for an employee's contribution. This is likely more intensely the case when it is spent on what could be seen as "unproductive time" such as paid holidays and sick leave. Problematically, however, the definitive threshold between the "right" amount and "excessive" is inextricably influenced by the respective and different subjective positions of interdependent stakeholders. Answers to questions such as, "*should we give workers longer than the legal lower limit for lunchtime?*", "*should we offer them more than statutory annual leave?*", and "*is this worker really sick?*" are influenced by an individual's partial view of the matter at hand. 'Right is on the side of life in its dispositions!' (Heidegger, 2001: 123). Personal biases prevent these sorts of questions ever being answered by perfectly rationalised calculations. Therefore, when the question of *how much is too much or not enough* is inevitably answered differently by partial perspectives, a latent tension always accompanies managerial decisions in the process of organisation.

These paradoxical pressures between balancing the well-being interests of the workforce and the financial interests of the shareholders are further complexified when it is also recognised that five of Solet's directors were owed preferential shares ranging from

£307,000-£8,892,000 in the financial year of 2022, with the largest sum being owed to the primary decision-maker, the CEO (Goniki TopCo, 2023: 87). In rather ordinary business realities such as these, where the highest authorities within the organisation are also substantial shareholders to whom they are duty-bound to serve, it is unclear whether their people's well-being can truly be *top* of their list of priorities.

Nevertheless, as the element of interdependency in paradox theory suggests, the well-being of a workforce must matter somewhat significantly in any case. While any organisation is at the behest of its meld of stakeholders, its principal activity depends upon the will and ability of its workforce, which in turn appears dependent upon the presence of positive employee experiences.

Irrespective of the relative extent of Solet's investors' and directors' underlying humanist or capitalist motivations, various statements made in official company documentation reflect the directors' interest in reconciling potential people-profitability tensions by raising organisational performance through excellent employee experiences. For example, in the Solet Impact Report 2022, a section bearing the CEO's signature states that, 'we're doing all we can to create the happiest workplace possible' (Solet, 2022: 7). The sentiment of this statement is mirrored in a series of others made in Solet's ultimate parent company's annual financial statements, as explained below.

The first of these comparable statements directly evokes the potential for paradoxical tensions between the multiple obligations that the organisation has to its different stakeholders. It reads, '[the Group] acknowledges that businesses should no longer just focus on creating profits for its shareholders' [sic] (Goniki TopCo, 2023: 4). The fact that this statement is made in the Strategic Report of a predominantly investor-facing document is an important factor to consider, especially in light of a further recognition that the company's 'employees are key to the success and growth of the business' (Goniki TopCo, 2023: 4). In combination, these statements allude to the equilibrium that must be maintained between the priorities of Solet's employees and shareholders (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Logically, both parties aim to benefit as much as possible from their contribution to the organisation. In the interdependent scenario in which they find themselves entangled, the employees carry out the work upon which the value of shares depend, while the shareholders supply the funds

upon which the reward for work depends. Therefore, it is the dual responsibility of management to optimise organisational conditions for both.

It is in the Directors' Report of the same document that a mechanism for why this may be the case is suggested: 'A better employee experience ultimately drives the customer and owner experience which in turn drives business performance' (Goniki TopCo, 2023: 23). It can be inferred from this suggested causal sequence that the directors of Solet understand the employee experience to be where mutually beneficial outcomes may be achieved for the organisation's people and performance. It is upon this reasoning that they go on to state that, '[the Group] continues to invest in its employees to ensure they are happy and engaged and provide them with the tools to drive excellence and a culture of continuous improvement' (Goniki TopCo, 2023: 23).

These words, authored or approved by Solet's directors, indicate their awareness of the paradoxical need to serve the organisation's many stakeholder groups simultaneously while remaining cognisant of the importance of their employee's experiences in order to achieve this. Before moving to see how they act out these well-meaning words, a final critique is made of one of the company's four explicit values for how it could seed negative organisational dynamics through its irony.

5.2.1.2. A paradoxical value: ownership

Solet is an organisation with 4 explicated values; these are "be one team", "own it", "communicate honestly", and "learn, grow and innovate" (Solet, 2023a). These values are presented on the About Solet page with the abovementioned collective term "our", which implies that these are the shared values of the employees of the company. One of these values, specifically "own it", is particularly paradoxical insofar as it is qualified by the tagline 'we care about our business as if it were our own' (Solet, 2023a: online). Yet, for the majority of Solet's workforce, it is not owned by them. As already established, it is owned by its shareholders, of whom the majority enact their share of ownership via an LLP. When there are other forms of commercial organisation out there which Solet could theoretically already be or have begun transitioning into (e.g., a worker cooperative or an employee ownership trust), it does seem peculiar to emphasise ownership in this symbolic way. This illustrates a

contraction between the company's expectation of its people to act as if they owned the business and the reality of its ownership structure. The risk here is that it may lead to employee dissatisfaction and a lack of engagement with the value of "own it".

Albeit with this question hovering over the company's choice of one of its explicit values, the values that are implied through its non-mandatory involvement with two business-cum-social initiatives suggest that it is an organisation with not just a strong capital telos, but a strong social one too. This can be seen through its part in the Better Business Act coalition and its recent attainment of the B Corporation certification, each of which are detailed in the following subsection, along with some of the social initiatives that it has instilled in its standard business operations.

5.2.2. Solet's social initiative

5.2.2.1. *The Better Business Act*

Solet is presented online as a proud co-signee of The Better Business Act, which is a campaign aimed at amending Section 172 of the UK Companies Act to ensure that companies align the interests of their shareholders with those of society and the planet (Better Business Act, 2024). Solet's involvement with this coalition supports the previously-mentioned words written in Solet's investor-facing documentation, that '[the Group] acknowledges that businesses should no longer just focus on creating profits for its shareholders' [sic] (Goniki TopCo, 2023: 4).

The goal of the Better Business Act is to make it a legal obligation for businesses to consider their social and environmental impact alongside profit (Better Business Act, 2024). The significance of this corporate endorsement alongside over 2,000 other UK businesses is that it could lead directors to be duty-bound by a higher power than their shareholders to report how they are 'benefiting workers... while delivering profit' (Better Business Act, 2024: online). This is of course the more ethical stance to take than disproportionately favouring the profit interest of shareholders, and more sustainable than disregarding the power of that interest in organisational ongoings. But it also brings to the forefront of managerial decision-making a paradox of balancing ethical responsibilities with financial imperatives. This dual focus challenges decision-making on a "business case" basis and requires innovative

approaches to ensure that both social and economic organisational goals are met without compromising one for the other.

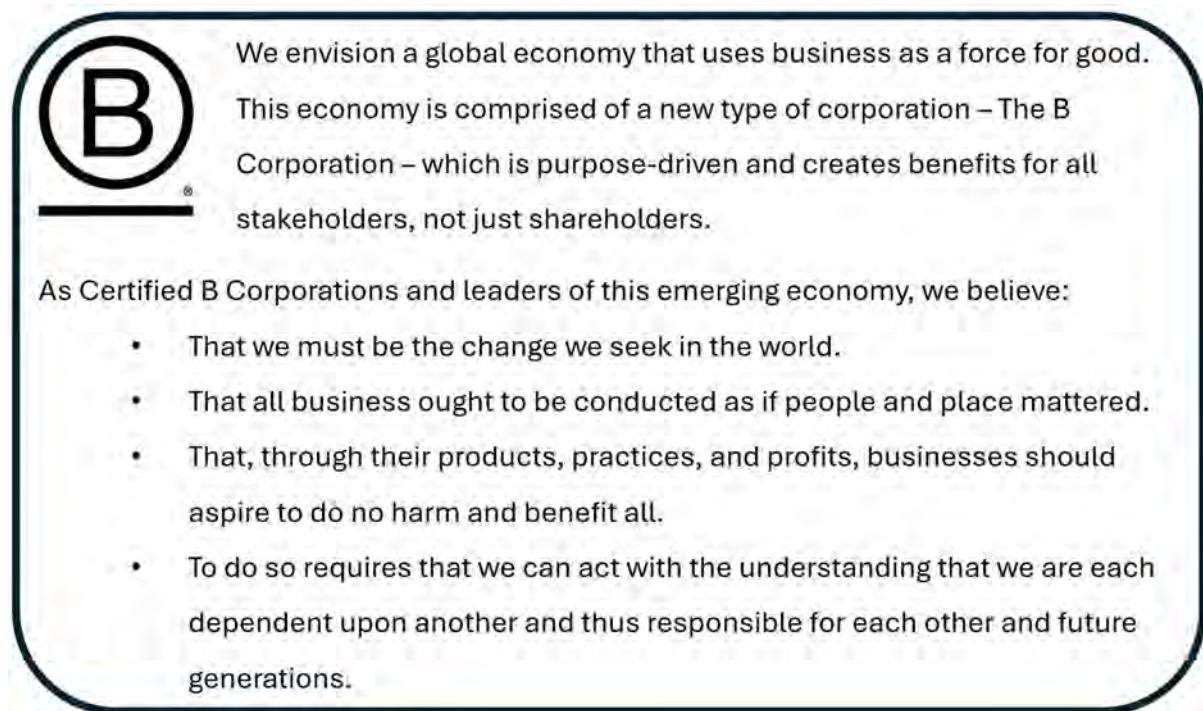
5.2.2.2. B Corp Certification

The B Corp Certification is a similarly paradoxical initiative in corporate social responsibility. B Corp is a designation given to companies that meet specified standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and accountability. It is awarded by the non-profit organisation B Lab, which declares an ambition to ‘shift the behaviour, culture, and structural underpinnings of capitalism’ (B Lab, 2024a: online). During the data collection of this investigation, Solet was finalising its portfolio of evidence to receive this certification, which was awarded several months later.

To become a B Corp, a company must:

- 1) achieve over 80 verified points over the five “impact” pillars of “Governance”, “Workers”, “Community”, “Environment”, and “Customers” (B Lab, 2024b),
- 2) formally meet the B Corp “legal requirement” by having the wording of its Articles of Association filed with Companies House amended to include legal phrasing specified by B Lab (2024c), and
- 3) sign and honour the “Declaration of Interdependence” (B Lab, 2024d), which is shown in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2. The B Corporation “Declaration of Interdependence”



Solet’s signing of the B Corp Declaration, coupled with its part in the Better Business Act coalition, strongly suggest that it is led by directors who actively endeavour to do well financially while (and by) doing good socially. It is also a sign that they recognise that if they wish to attract and retain ‘best-in-class talent’ (Goniki TopCo, 2023: 23) for the sake of the organisation’s performance overall, then they cannot overlook the desires of their employees to feel that they are part of something more personally meaningful than a mere money-making machine.

5.2.2.3. Solet’s other social initiatives

The Solet Impact Report 2022 details how the company tries to create a more meaningful employee experience through the design of its policies in line with a ‘support the whole person’ mindset (Solet, 2022: 22). The measures adopted are many and varied. For example, employee welfare is considered through needs-based reactive offerings such as confidential counselling and advice services (Solet, 2022). Support measures such as these have the potential to attenuate the negative consequences of well-being crises for both people and performance.

Atop this, Solet encourages its employees to take part in volunteering and fundraising by affording them two paid days per year to spend on any charitable cause(s) of their choice. Judging by the many smiling faces in the dozens of photos of these events in the Solet (2022) Impact Report, this proactive, prosocial initiative could lead to various beneficial outcomes for both employees and the organisation, such as strengthening interpersonal relations between colleagues and inspiring admiration for the philanthropy of their corporate employer.

In an innovative way to blend social and corporate achievement, the company also procedurally recognises its 'Volunteers of the Month' alongside other award-winners for long service and delivering in-line with the company values (Solet, 2022: 17). It also celebrates its people by giving them an 'additional day's leave to celebrate their birthday' (Solet, 2022: 21). Rather than just offering x days of annual leave, this clever measure may promote a sense among employees that the company genuinely values their personal lives by ensuring that their birthday is a "day off" by default.

The business also invests in its people's professional lives by offering them the ability to study either in-house in the 'learning suites' at its HQ or remotely on their 'online learning platform' (Solet, 2022: 22). The company regards personal growth as a vital part of its high-performance culture (Solet, 2022), as both employees and the organisation can benefit from skill and knowledge accrual in the workforce (Loon et al., 2019). Further, in an effort to make its HQ more than a place of work, Solet has an entire floor dedicated to employee well-being and leisure (LocalNews, 2020). This space includes various casual seating areas (e.g., sofas, chairs, booths), a games area (e.g., darts, table tennis, pool, Xbox), books, musical instruments, and a gym.

Solet's investment in these various social initiatives reflects the company's commitment to enriching the employee experience. But they also reveal the conflation between social responsibility and financial pragmatism. These initiatives may represent the most strategic allocation of company resources, given their potential to attract and retain best-in-class talent through the way that they might augment the holistic employee experience – a win for people and a win for performance. When 'work is only one part of a full life' (Solet, 2022: 22), companies are wise to consider how they may become more worth their workers' while working *there*, not just anywhere. However, within this modern organisational paradox –

where costly corporate social initiatives must not undermine a company's bottom line – the line between excellent investment and excessive expenditure remains difficult to define. In light of these intertwined commitments to social and fiscal responsibility, the next section examines how well Solet has sustained its performance while managing this paradox.

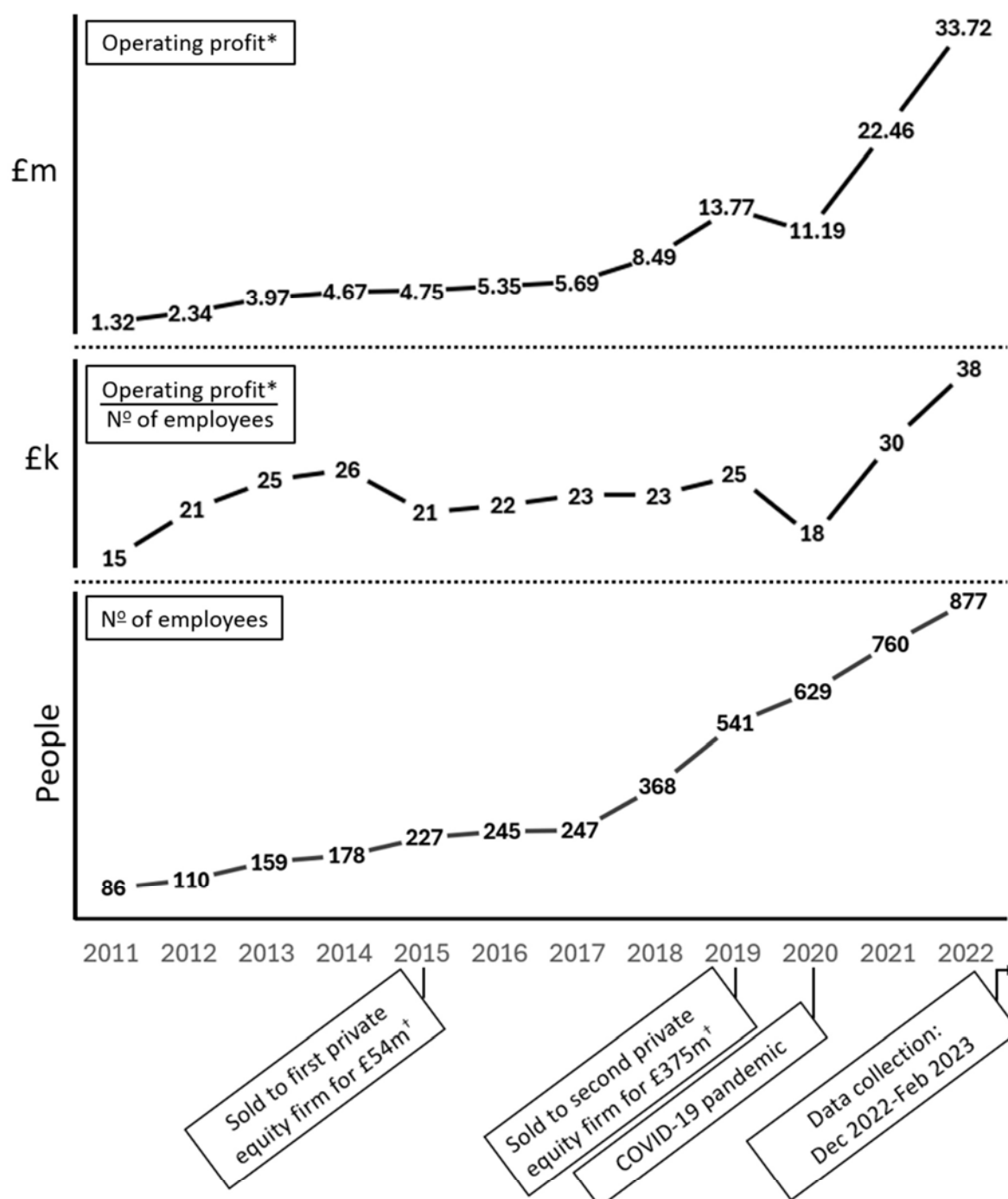
5.3. The performance of Solet: etic and emic perspectives

Organisational performance can be defined in a variety of ways. This section does so from two key perspectives and with a mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators in each. Firstly, it shows Solet's performance from an external viewpoint through evidence of its long-term growth and financial performance coupled with various awards that it has accumulated over these years. Thereafter, the company's performance is shown from the internal viewpoint of its employees through the HPO scale (de Waal, 2012a), which is considered in context of scores received by other organisations, Solet's Glassdoor reviews in the year leading up to primary data collection, and additional awards that the company has accrued that have a direct relevance to its people.

5.3.1. The etic perspective

Despite the extent of investors' funds and management time and attention that have been invested into measures that could be seen as surplus to business requirement, Solet boasts an impressive growth and financial trajectory. To demonstrate this, a timeline of the company's noteworthy performance-related information is presented in the below infographic (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3. An infographic of Solet's operating profit, operating profit per employee, number of employees, and notable events from financial years ending September 2011-2022



Notes:

Chart data obtained from annual financial statements filed on Companies House.

£m = £million; £k = £thousand.

*Adjusted for exceptional items and other income beyond standard operations to facilitate comparison between periods and to better represent trends in financial performance produced by principal activity (i.e., holiday letting agency service in the UK and Ireland).

[†]Source: The Telegraph (2019).

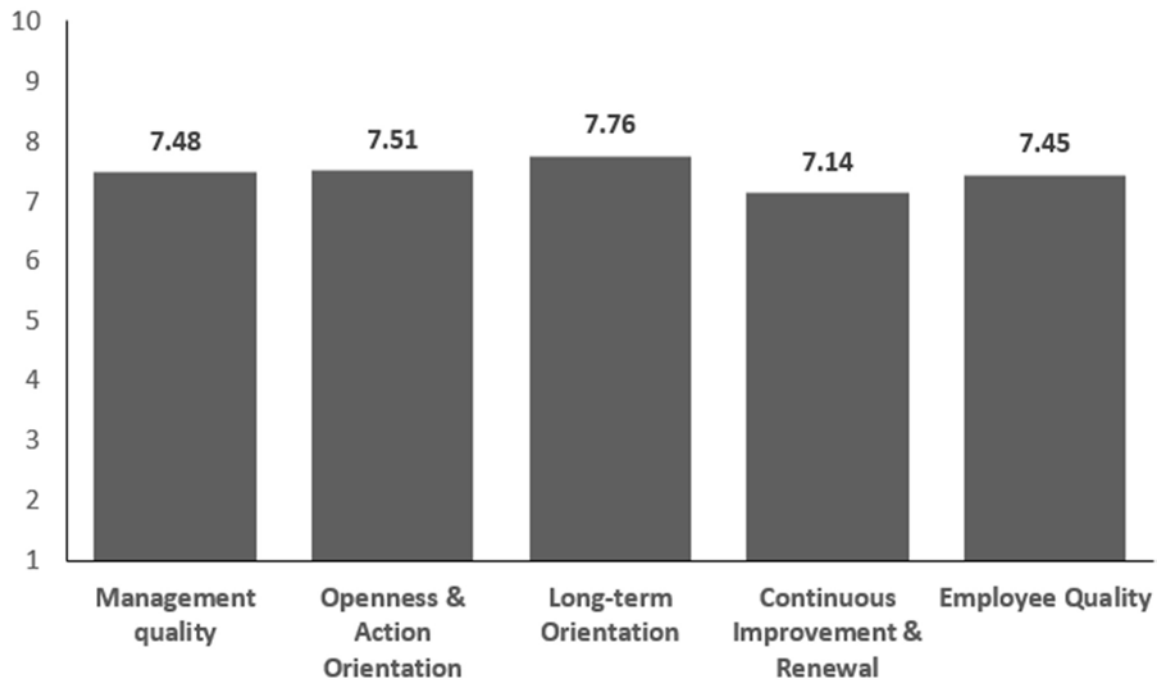
As can be seen from Figure 5.3, Solet has consistently grown in terms of its workforce and operating profits. Its operating profits per employee during this timeframe suggest that it has overall harnessed the time, effort, and expertise of its people to generate return with increasing efficiency. Further, while the company may have benefitted from the post-pandemic nature of the “staycation” market, it also appears to have resiliently weathered COVID-19’s significant business interruption while also increasing its workforce, bouncing back stronger than ever.

The various awards that Solet has obtained over the years serve as further qualitative indicators that it had been prepared to deal with such unexpected disruption for quite some time. The organisation has accrued awards for its nature as a travel business (2013-2023 British Travel Awards), others for its place in the technology sector (2018 and 2022 Northern Tech Awards), and others still for its customer service (2018 Feefo Gold Trusted Service Award and Trustpilot “Excellent” rating). Since 2017 it has been led by an award-winning CEO (2018 CEO Today Awards) and has been recognised for its impressive rate of growth (2019 London Stock Exchange 1000 Companies to Inspire and 2020 Sunday Times Fast Track 100).

5.3.2. The emic perspective

The view from the people of Solet captured in the employee survey of this investigation – although only a snapshot of the organisation between December 2022 and February 2023 – broadly corroborates the external presentation of the company’s historical performance. Based on the perspectives of the employees that responded to the survey in this investigation, Solet appears to be a well-performing organisation (de Waal, 2012a). Overall, the company received an average score of 7.47 on a scale of 1 to 10 across the five HPO factors. Further, scores were relatively consistent among all factors. These are presented in Figure 5.4 below.

Figure 5.4. Solet's HPO score



n = 184-188 across the 35 survey items.

To contextualise Solet's overall score of 7.47, this number is higher than the average of 6.70 found across multiple Dutch organisations surveyed in de Waal (2018). It also stands out in comparison to the highest scoring location of a large (5000-employee) UK-wide technology company, whose employees of that particular site collectively rated it 7.14 (de Waal and Goedegebuure, 2017). Compared to the scores of 15 organisations reported in de Waal (2012a) of varying size, field, and location, Solet's 7.47 would rank fifth highest (Table 5.1).

This comparison is merely made for contextualisation, recognising that the companies referenced in Table 5.1 differ substantially in organisational form and managerial context. However, within the range of scores received (6.10-8.74), some of which were following a HPO management intervention that successfully raised prior scores, this shows that the survey respondents of Solet perceive their organisation to be overall performing rather well in comparison to an assortment of other workforces reviewing their respective organisations.

Table 5.1. The HPO scores of 15 organisations reported in de Waal (2012b), ordered from highest to lowest

Organisation	Field	Location	HPO score
Longfellow Benefits	Consultancy	USA	8.74
Atrion Networking Corporation	Business IT	USA	8.58
Amanco Plastigama	Plastics	Ecuador	8.50
Ministry of Local Governance and Social Affairs (MINALOC)	Government	Rwanda	7.48
Archway Marketing	Marketing	USA	7.42
Grohe	Manufacturing/ supply	Netherlands	7.14*
Nabil Bank	Banking	Nepal	7.14*
Retail International Group	Retail	Multiple (Intercontinental)	7.02
Manufacturing company A considering merger with company B (below)	Manufacturing	<i>Not reported</i>	6.92
Palestine Polytechnic University	Education	Palestine	6.78
ATLAS Consortium (HP, Fujitsu, Cassadian, and Logica)	IT	UK/International	6.42*
De Beers Marine	Diamond exploration	South Africa	6.40
Manufacturing company B considering merger with company A (above)	Manufacturing	<i>Not reported</i>	6.22
Iringa University College	Education	Tanzania	6.22*
South American College of Higher Education (SACHE)	Education	Multiple (South America)	6.10

*post-intervention (highest) score

This positive perspective of the people of Solet is reflected also in further awards that the company has gained over the years that are based on employee feedback. For example, in 2019 and 2020 Solet featured as one of “The Sunday Times Best Companies to Work For” (LocalNews, 2019; Solet, 2023a) and was rated as a 2020 “Outstanding Company to Work For” by Best Companies (2021). These awards, unlike those presented in Section 5.3.1 which attest to Solet’s external performance and reputation, offer insight into the company’s internal performance from the perspective of its people. Moreover, in the 12 months leading up to the close of primary data collection (15th February 2023), Solet’s average rating on Glassdoor based on 36 review ratings was 3.64 (comprising 18 5-star, 5 4-star, 4 3-star, 0 2-star reviews, and 9 1-star reviews). On Glassdoor’s 5-point rating scale (Glassdoor, 2024),

this suggests that people were on average “Satisfied” with Solet during this period. For range comparison, a score of 3.50 would indicate “OK”, while a score of 4.01 would indicate “Very Satisfied” (Glassdoor, 2024).

This array of quantitative and qualitative performance data from outside and within the organisation reveal Solet to be an interesting prototypical organisation in which to study the performance management paradox in the tradition of paradox scholarship. It is a company with numerous awards to its name and a consistent track record of profitability. It appears also to be generally positively reviewed by its people, having obtained respectable scores on the HPO scale and Glassdoor ratings. Though it possesses a certain configurational uniqueness that naturally limits the degree of generalisability that can be drawn from it (Tsoukas, 2017), Solet is nevertheless worth studying to explore manageable organisational conditions that could be valuable to surface for managerial reflection (Aguinis et al., 2012).

This is especially the case when it is recognised that the HPO score is an average, and therefore not an exact representation of everyone’s experience – which the 9 (negative) 1-star Glassdoor reviews reveal. Both the employee experience theoretical perspective and the context of paradoxical tensions suggest that it is important to consider more than just trends of the collective mass of employees, but also the richness of information that individual experiences within the cohort can offer. It is from this nuance that deeper insight may be found for the mastery of the performance management paradox.

The following section examines the potential for paradoxical outcomes to continually occur under the same management within a single organisation. It does this by drawing on radically different experiences within Solet which allude to the persistent challenge of pleasing all parties in the ongoing activity of management. Specifically, the section begins by examining sharply contrasting comments from two respondents to the employee questionnaire regarding their respective experience of Solet’s general management. It then moves to the account of an interviewee concerning a manager that likely created paradoxical people and performance outcomes through their choice of actions.

5.4. A view of the performance management paradox in Solet originating from the employee experience

5.4.1. Contrasting employee experiences

In the case of Solet, with its HQ having a greater array of attractive employee facilities (e.g., the Learning Suites and well-being and leisure floor), one could assume that employees in one of the many distant satellite subsidiary offices that lack these facilities could generally be having more negative employee experiences relative to their colleagues at HQ - after all, they exist at HQ intentionally to enhance the employee experience there. Perhaps this is true in the perception of some employees within the company. However, two verbatim responses to the open-text field inviting any further comments on the questionnaire allude to two highly contrasting experiences that indicate that the antithesis is also possible. The first is from **Val**, who was subsequently interviewed in this investigation and whose satellite office is just under 150 miles from HQ. The second is from a survey respondent who worked in HQ and who chose not to give their name, and who is therefore henceforth referred to as **Anon**:

***Val:** Since our integration with [Solet] things have got so much better for me.*

***Anon** [sic]: managers all focus on results and dont care how they get them, you could have an incentive of 30 calls, all could be trash and wrongly worked, they wouldnt care, as long as you get those numbers in, also [solet] has no case by case policy, we're all just dots that look teh same to them. they also emply managers from outside of the company, some have been here a year annd STILL don't know how to work here, Grunt staff shouldn't know more than the managers, what a joke.*

Val's comment is succinct. As was later learnt in their interview, prior to Solet taking over their smaller regional business, they had had a terrible time with the former management. Were it not for their need of money and the fact that they enjoyed the job, they believe that they would have left, feeling at the time that they may not have been able to cope much longer there. However, under the new management of Solet, **Val** felt very positive about the organisation in which they worked.

Contrasted to this positive experience, however, **Anon's** comments suggest that they felt highly disgruntled with Solet's management approach at HQ at the time of writing. The contrast of these experiences suggests that there is very likely always the potential for

surprisingly positive and negative organisational dynamics to be present within the organisational system. As is consistent with Hahn and Knight's (2021a) probabilistic interpretation of paradox, these dynamics are evolutionary, determined by a combination of the material circumstances in which people find themselves (e.g., specific teams, departments, offices, etc., all working to a performance mandate in one way or another), but also the discursive element of personal perspective concerning these circumstances.

Yet, these personal views come from people who feel them and act upon those feelings in ways that feed into the organisation (for better or worse). And though it is not possible to determine how these attitudes translate into day-to-day actions without direct observation or further testimony, such documented divergence of experience points to the importance of attending to employee perceptions not just as predictors of behaviour, but as signs of underlying organisational dynamics that may influence performance in nuanced and context dependent ways through their impact on morale and discretionary self-investment. Recalling the words of Solet's directors, that '[a] better employee experience ultimately drives the customer and owner experience which in turn drives business performance' (Goniki TopCo, 2023: 23), it is, therefore, important to heed criticism born in negative employee experiences as much as the compliments found in positive ones.

Most interestingly, as can be seen in **Anon's** criticism of Solet's management, their frustration is clearly not a feature of indifference but an apparent passion for performance of a sort, expressed through their impression of management inadequacy. From this micro-foundational origin of just two contrasting experiences, it is possible to see that aside from the definition of "management" as a homogenous hierarchical entity, "management" of people for performance is an amorphous and continuous challenge for managers within the organisation that demands the consideration of the influential subjectivities of employees.

5.4.2. A conflict between colleagues with potentially counteractive outcomes

A further recounted experience of another interviewee, **Jean**, can be used to exemplify how managers can also create paradoxical dynamics with their actions. In their interview, **Jean** introduced this intriguing recollection by saying, "*we were just talking about who our best*

managers were. I can remember mine. His name was Billie” (pseudonym). They then went on to give an example as to why Billie was such a great manager in their view:

***Jean:** I remember our team was a little bit more boisterous than others. But we hit our productivity, time and time and time again. Then I remember one manager had put in a complaint about how boisterous we were. And I remember Billie had actually made like a stand, like stood up... and he went, “the moment your team is outperforming mine is the moment you can criticise how my team acts”. And from that moment I respected that about him.*

Through this act of defence of their team’s behaviour, it appears that this manager gained an advocate and ally in **Jean**. From this moment, Billie seems to have risen in **Jean’s** estimations, as is further indicated by **Jean’s** additional comment, *“I worked harder for him than I’ve worked for anybody else, even now”*.

Yet, while **Jean’s** account highlights the motivational impact of Billie’s boldness in defending his team’s bullish behaviour, it also gestures towards the paradoxical potential of performance-related managerial actions in daily organisation life. It is evident that this confrontational stance curried favour with **Jean**, with apparently positive implications for his desire to perform for his superior. However, **Jean’s** account also alludes to a fellow manager and possible other colleagues in said manager’s team, each with their own interpretation of the situation. Examining this recalled event from a perspective that considers the active role that people play in producing or intensifying tensions through interaction, it is possible to infer how a manager’s single choice of action can spur divergent interpretations ‘that give rise to contradictory actions’ (Putnam et al., 2016: 18). Where **Jean** may have interpreted the moment as a display of strong leadership and accordingly responded with increased engagement and commitment, others may have experienced the same moment as belittling or divisive – particularly if it reinforced an adversarial atmosphere or left unresolved the original source of complaint. These reflections on this isolated event are intended to illustrate the ‘multiplicity of views’ of which managers must be continually aware (Smith and Lewis, 2011: 390), as such views are the precursors of colleagues’ subsequent interactions through which performance is enacted. And while this analysis assumes the views of voices unheard, it draws attention to instances where managers may not be conscious of the part that they play in propagating paradox through their actions (Putnam et al., 2016).

5.5. Chapter summary

By examining the case organisation at the centre of this investigation from both an external perspective and a combination of the shared and contrasting subjective experiences of employees within, this chapter has instantiated a case of the performance management paradox. Through the words and decisions of its directors, it has shown how the organisation operates amid a literal conflict of interdependent (social and financial) interests. It has also shown how the same management (be that at the organisational level or the individual level) experienced differently can produce counteractive outcomes.

Yet, through its documentation of Solet's track record of strong growth and financial performance, along with its portfolio of pledges, awards, and social initiatives, this chapter has also demonstrated an organisation that appears to be achieving its high-performance in no small part via a keen interest in the potential of positive employee experiences. To advance this line of inquiry, to further understand how management may be able to simultaneously serve the people and performance of their organisation, the next chapter examines how employees' perceptions of management activity relate to their HAW, and the role that their view of the organisation's overarching character plays in this relationship.

Chapter 6. Results 2 – In search of positive potential within the performance management paradox: a structural equation model for management reflection

Building upon the theoretical foundations of the literature review, this chapter examines how management may be able to respond to the performance management paradox via the employee experience. As established in Chapter 2, managerial efforts to enhance organisational performance can inadvertently produce self-undermining effects when these efforts are experienced adversely by employees – a situation that is neither optimal for people nor performance. Expanding on this, Chapter 3 proposed the employee experience-based MEO model that illustrates how employee perceptions of management action can impact organisational outcomes for better or worse.

To address the question of how management can simultaneously serve both the people and performance of their organisation, this chapter operationalises the proposed model using PLS-SEM and IPMA. These methods are used to assess the hypothesised relationships between employees' perceptions of HPMA and POC and their HAW. Through this analysis, the chapter identifies actionable insights for management, providing strategic attention points to enhance organisational performance via the employee experience.

The chapter begins with the preliminary analyses performed to assess the appropriateness of the questionnaire data for PLS-SEM. Following this, each of the construct measurement models are specified. This leads to a slight yet significant adjustment to the nomological model, for which the hypotheses presented in Chapter 4 are reclarified. The chapter then presents the evaluation of the measurement models and structural model. Following this, it discusses the support for the hypotheses and the potential significance of the findings, which are further explored through IPMA. The chapter concludes with a summary section and transition to further qualitative analyses in the next chapter.

6.1. Preliminary analyses

To determine the minimum sample size required to reliably detect effects found in previous similar investigations (Chun, 2005; 2017; de Waal, 2018; Mroueh and de Waal, 2020; Martin, 2021), an *a priori* power analysis was computed using the inverse square root method (Kock and Hadaya, 2018; Hair et al., 2021). Based on the smallest reported path coefficient between variables of interest (0.28 in de Waal, 2018: 132), a minimum of 79 observations was determined necessary to achieve sufficient power for reliably detecting expected effects⁹.

Additionally, for reliability in PLS-SEM, each case of observations should be $\geq 85\%$ complete and each item of a construct should be $> 95\%$ complete¹⁰ (Hair et al., 2022). After removing survey responses that did not meet the requisite completion threshold, there were (*n*) 184 usable observations. The mean value replacement method was used to replace missing data (Hair et al., 2022). *a posteriori* power analysis conducted in SmartPLS verified that the sample size was sufficient to detect all computed effects with statistical reliability.

While having sufficient observations is an important criterion, a sample must also be representative of the population it is purported to represent in relative and qualitative terms. The sample of 184 employees represented 18.76% of the 981 employees working within Solet or its subsidiary “sister” brands¹¹. For comparison with similar studies, this response percentage is lower than Mroueh and de Waal’s (2020) study of a single organisation (95.5%) but higher than de Waal’s (2018) study of multiple organisations (5%) assessing similar variables (i.e., HPO, work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction). In light of these previous investigations, the capture of just under 1 in 5

⁹ This is for a commonly accepted power level of 80% and significance level of 5%. The calculation for this minimum sample size is $(2.486 \div 0.28)^2 = 78.83$ (Hair et al., 2021: 17).

¹⁰ This $> 95\%$ value is specifically to be able to use the mean replacement method. If casewise/listwise missing information treatment were to be employed, this value can be $\geq 91\%$. However, the casewise/listwise deletion method can substantially impact predictive power because it removes all observations from the data that have a missing value in any of the variables. The mean replacement method ensures that models are informed by all cases in all instances.

¹¹ The figure of 981 is drawn from the ‘monthly average number of persons, including the Directors, employed by the Company during the period’ of 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023 as reported in the company’s annual financial statements of that year. As the data collection spanned 16 December 2022 to 15 February 2023, the true average across this 3-month period is likely to be close to the reported average figure of the 2022-2023 financial year.

employee experiences of their organisation was considered a reasonably representative sample of a meaningful proportion of the organisation's people.

Analysis of the sample's normality characteristics generally supported this assertion. The data were assessed for outliers that could potentially impact inferential statistical results using summed scores for each scale (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). The presence of several outliers (Table 6.1) suggest that the sample acquired may not be a perfect representation of the "average" employee at that time in the organisation. But these anomalies were not seen to void the sample's ability to demonstrate effects which are present in the experiences of many colleagues at the company.

Table 6.1. Outliers in the questionnaire survey dataset

Variable	Number of outliers	Response (nearest first)
HPMA	1	194
POC	3	213, 248, 107
WE	5	120, 107, 213, 301, 248
OC	-	-
JS	-	-

WE = work engagement; OC = organisational commitment; JS = job satisfaction. These abbreviations are consistently used in all Tables and Figures in this chapter.

Outliers, of course, suggest a limitation to the sample's ability to define all experiences, as they indicate that there are potentially significantly divergent experiences within the organisation amongst the set. As responses were directly and automatically imported via the survey software, they were highly unlikely to be erroneous entries in the dataset, but rather a feature of real-world data. Accordingly, in this exploratory fieldwork, it was decided that these responses should be retained for the integrity of the raw data despite their potential impact upon the model results.

Further normality analysis suggested that the potential impact of these outliers was minor. The mean and 5% trimmed mean for each variable were similar, consistently oriented, and within the 95% confidence interval, which is indicative of no substantial distortions caused by outliers (Pallant, 2020). Moreover, as Table 6.2 shows, the percentage difference between the overall mean and the 5% trimmed mean was 1.59% or less for all variables.

This largest percentage difference was for organisational commitment, which had no outlier responses, thereby implying minimal data distortion. As both the trimmed mean and the mean were within the 95% confidence interval of the “true” mean, this was taken as further evidence of the lack of distortion with these outliers retained.

Table 6.2. The 95% confidence interval for the mean, the mean, the 5% trimmed mean, the difference between the mean and the 5% trimmed mean, and sample skewness

Variable	95% confidence interval for the mean		Mean	5% Trimmed mean	Difference (%)	Skewness
	Lower	Upper				
HPMA	72.78	77.71	75.24	76.18	1.25%	-0.809
POC	67.08	70.66	68.87	69.66	1.15%	-0.776
WE	10.89	11.57	11.23	11.35	1.07%	-0.793
OC	10.23	11.12	10.67	10.84	1.59%	-0.523
JS	9.86	10.70	10.28	10.37	0.88%	-0.653

All mean values are summed scores of variables in each scale.

In all variables, the 5% trimmed mean was higher than the overall mean. Since all outliers were at the negative end of the scale, this demonstrated the sample’s negative skew (or “tailedness”). Analysis of histograms confirmed the clustering of responses at the positive end of all scales. The skewness statistics, although indicating a non-normal distribution, were consistent with Blanca et al.’s (2013) findings that non-normal data distributions are the norm in real-world data.

In terms of the descriptive nature of the dataset, the mass of responses being on the positive end of the scale could suggest disproportionately positive responses compared to non-respondent employee views. Alternatively, this could indicate that the organisation has an exceptionally positive cohort of employees. In either case, the sample was deemed appropriate for PLS-SEM analysis. Despite the Shapiro-Wilk statistic suggesting non-normal distribution ($p < 0.001$), the skewness values of -0.809 (for HPMA) or lower were comfortably within the -2.49 to 2.33 range observed in previous published investigations with survey data (Blanca et al., 2013). Furthermore, as PLS-SEM is a non-parametric form of

analysis that employs bootstrapping to determine statistical significance (Hair et al., 2019), this data distribution was not seen as problematic.

The numerical data were also assessed for straightlining behaviour, which is when respondents give the same response to all questions in a survey battery. This response pattern can be a sign of disengagement with a questionnaire, which can risk the quality of the data obtained. While there is no universal approach to measure straightlining, the approach taken in this investigation was to assess the standard deviation of the rating scale for each respondent (Kim et al., 2019b). The results of this examination showed that no respondent straightlined throughout their questionnaire. The lowest overall standard deviation was 0.2. However, some straightlining was observed within questionnaire sections (e.g., the POC section). In total, 21 respondents provided the same numerical answer to all questions within one of the survey sections, while 2 respondents provided the same numerical answer to two of the survey sections.

The decision was taken not to remove these respondents from the dataset. This was because further inspection showed that 3 of the subsequently interviewed employees were among those who straightlined a section of the questionnaire (**Val**, **Sacha**, and **Drew**). These individuals were all very keen to share their views of the organisation, each evidently holding it in very high regard in the interviews. As shown in the previous chapter, **Val** even left an open text comment that qualified their strong agreement (5 out of 5) with all the positive organisational characteristics on the survey. Accordingly, no assumptions were made as to the motives of the other survey respondents who exhibited similar behaviour when completing the questionnaire.

6.2. Specification of the measurement models

The following subsections outline the measurement models used in this study to capture HAW, HPMA, and POC. All constructs in this study were modelled reflectively according to classical test theory (Finn and Wang, 2014). This means that the measured items (i.e., questionnaire responses) are conceptualised as reflections (manifestations) of the latent construct to which they are attributed. This was concluded on the basis that the data upon which the constructs depend are literal reflections of employees' perceptions – introspective

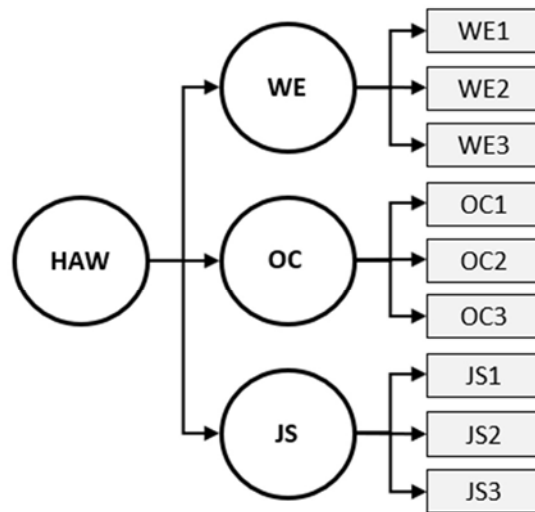
in the case of HAW and extrospective in the case of HPMA and POC – which were prompted by questionnaire and translated into numerical form.

6.2.1. Happiness at work (HAW)

In accordance with Fisher's (2010) recommendation, HAW was conceived as a higher-order construct (HOC), and therefore modelled as a 'reflective-reflective' hierarchical component model (HCM) comprising the lower-order constructs (LOCs) of work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction (Sarstedt et al., 2019: 2). The S-HAW scale developed by Salas-Vallina and Alegre (2021) contains a holistic array of reflective indicators of HAW, capturing feelings of vigour, dedication, and absorption in work (work engagement); attachment to, belonging in, and desire to remain with an organisation (organisational commitment); and (dis)satisfaction with work, pay, and prospects (job satisfaction).

To construct HAW as a HCM, the disjoint two-stage approach was employed. As indicated by the name, this means that the measurement model assessment protocol spanned two stages. The first stage assessed the reliability and validity of the LOCs reflecting HAW. Thereafter, with the requisite criteria having been met, the PLS algorithm was rerun with HAW reflected by the resultant latent variable scores (LVSSs) of these LOCs (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1. The reflective-reflective HCM of HAW comprising the LOCs of work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction

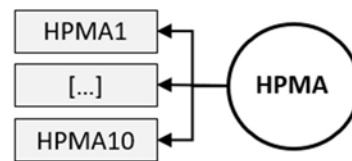


Label	Indicator
WE1	At my job I feel strong and vigorous
WE2	I am enthusiastic about my job
WE3	I get carried away when I am working
OC1	I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation
OC2	I feel 'emotionally attached' to this organisation
OC3	I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organisation
JS1	I am satisfied with the work I do
JS2	I am satisfied with the pay I receive for my job
JS3	I am satisfied with the opportunities which exist in this organisation for advancement (promotion)

6.2.2. High-performance management action (HPMA)

Drawing from de Waal's (2012a) HPO framework, perceived HPMA was conceptualised as a distinct construct comprising specific management actions that impact organisational performance and employee experiences (de Waal and Goedegebuure, 2017; de Waal, 2018; Mroueh and de Waal, 2020). It was modelled using only items from the HPO scale that explicitly referred to management behaviours in the active tense. As shown in Figure 6.2, HPMA comprised 10 indicators capturing employees' perceptions of a range of performance-related management actions.

Figure 6.2. The HPMA measurement model



Label	Indicator
HPMA1	Management applies fast decision making
HPMA2	Management applies fast action taking
HPMA3	Management coaches organisational members to achieve better results
HPMA4	Management focuses on achieving results
HPMA5	Management applies strong leadership
HPMA6	Management always holds organisational members responsible for their results
HPMA7	Management frequently engages in a dialogue with employees
HPMA8	Management allows making mistakes
HPMA9	Management welcomes change
HPMA10	Management inspires organisational members to accomplish extraordinary results

6.2.3. Positive organisational character (POC)

At the outset of this investigation, the intention was to use Chun's (2005) original form of the VEC scale as a reflective measure of perceived POC through its 6 dimensions of organisational character. In the original formulation of this construct these 6 character traits were *integrity*, *empathy*, *courage*, *warmth*, *zeal*, and *conscientiousness*, each of which are represented by 4 related characteristics. For example, *integrity* is said to be measured by indicators of an organisation being *honest*, *sincere*, *socially-responsible*, and *trustworthy* (Chun, 2005). The full set of character traits and indicative characteristics can be seen in Table 6.4 of Section 6.2.3.1 below.

A problem arose, however, during initial revalidation checks to establish the appropriateness of this model for the current investigation. The model presented multiple issues of discriminant validity between its components. Specifically, this issue was noted by the high heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios (Henseler et al., 2015) between characteristics, which suggested that they were not statistically discernible from one another. These values are shown below in Table 6.3.

When HTMT values are ≥ 0.90 it is an indication that constructs are not distinct and are in fact measuring the same phenomenon. More than half of the HTMT values were in excess of 0.90, with the highest being 1.007 (between *integrity* and *warmth*). A simple reason for this may be the “halo effect” (Martin, 2021), whereby an employee’s sense of their organisation possessing, for example, the positive characteristic of *warmth* is likely to coincide with their sense of it also possessing *integrity* (and *vice versa*).

Table 6.3. HTMT results of the original VEC scale

	Integrity	Empathy	Courage	Warmth	Zeal
Empathy	0.970				
Courage	0.684	0.691			
Warmth	1.007	0.963	0.726		
Zeal	0.832	0.841	0.877	0.877	
Conscientiousness	0.927	0.926	0.908	0.947	0.970

It seems that Martin (2021) may also have encountered this problem in their revalidation of the original scale. In their investigation into employee perspectives that led to expressions of organisational commitment, Martin (2021) used PCA to draw out the two highest-loading traits of *empathy* and *courage* from the assortment, on the basis that the characteristics of being *sympathetic*, *supportive*, and *reassuring* (denoting *empathy*) and *ambitious*, *achievement-oriented*, and *competent* (denoting *courage*) ranked among the highest-loading indicators in each component, respectively.

However, as this process resulted in the omission of the character trait that had previously been shown to be most important for employees’ sense of satisfaction and identification with their organisation (Chun, 2005; 2017), namely *integrity*, an alternative revalidation approach was taken. As is detailed in the subsequent two subsections, this approach consisted of a refinement process of deductive semantic analysis of the interview data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to find direct references to any of the original 24 VEC characteristics, followed by PCA of this refined set.

6.2.3.1. Deductive semantic analysis

As this investigation had the benefit of interview data regarding employees' experiences of being in their organisation, these were analysed to draw out direct references to Chun's (2005) virtuous/ethical organisational characteristics. As is shown in Table 6.4 below, interviewees made direct reference to 17 of the 24 characteristics. These 17 characteristics were selected for PCA.

Table 6.4. Deductive semantic analysis of interviewees' references to virtuous/ethical organisational characteristics in and of the organisation

Characteristics	Example excerpt
<i>Integrity</i>	
Honest	Jude: <i>It's a very honest business.</i>
Sincere	-
Socially-responsible	Drew: <i>They don't just put on their CSR, "oh we do this, this, and this". You know, they actually do.</i>
Trustworthy	Aiden: <i>I know who I can trust to do the work.</i>
<i>Empathy</i>	
Concerned	Jan: <i>You're trying to put your concerns across, you're trying to put what's holding you back across, and it's dismissed because it's never affected those above you.</i>
Reassuring	-
Supportive	Sacha: <i>Feeling that you're able to go to somebody with an issue or a problem if you have one and know that you will get listened to and supported in that.</i>
Sympathetic	-
<i>Courage</i>	
Ambitious	Ellis: <i>A lot of that challenge comes from the company ambition. I think, as well, it's driven by... the clear direction that the company wants to move and the pace at which they want to move in that direction.</i>
Achievement-oriented	Drew: <i>Sometimes we have to go over and above to achieve the organisational goals.</i>
Leading	Avery: <i>It's about having that leadership that is able to consistently be really kind of engaged, really positive. They don't hide away in offices, they're really communicative.</i>
Competent	-
<i>Warmth</i>	
Friendly	Tyler: <i>Everyone seemed really friendly and welcoming.</i>
Open	Drew: <i>[Solet] is much more open... They're giving you a lot of information and giving you an opportunity to ask a question.</i>

Zeal	Pleasant	Casey: <i>There is a real effort to make it a pleasant environment.</i>
	Straightforward	-
	Exciting	Robin: <i>We know that things are only gonna get bigger... I think it's really exciting.</i>
	Innovative	Ali: <i>There's some things work related, like some sort of innovations and some things I'd like to implement that people don't seem to pay much attention, and that kind of annoys me a bit.</i>
	Imaginative	-
Conscientiousness	Spirited	-
	Reliable	Francis: <i>You rely on them really, on their work to move forward with yours, and when they are either not responding to messages or something, it keeps you at a standstill position. You're not able to work so you're unhappy.</i>
	Hardworking	Charlie: <i>It was nice when [CEO] took that bit of time just to show, you know, appreciation for the people that have been here, being loyal to the company, you know, worked hardest.</i>
	Proud	Drew: <i>They seem to walk the walk... So, as an organisation, I think they can be proud of themselves.</i>
	Secure	Alex: <i>This is part of human nature... You need to be in a sort of safe and secure environment and relationships.</i>

With specific regard to the characteristic “straightforward”, though it was mentioned, a decision was taken to omit this from the modelling of POC. This was primarily based on comments from interviewees **Jean** and **Stevie**, which both suggest that the characteristic “straightforward” in work-related contexts could be interpreted by questionnaire respondents as either a positive or negative character trait. For example:

Jean: *People think sometimes that being straightforward is disrespectful, when technically you can do it and be respectful.*

Stevie: *One of the criticisms of me is that my approach— is that I’m very direct... I won’t beat about the bush... So, sometimes that probably doesn’t work.*

In the above two statements, **Jean** effectively describes **Stevie’s** approach, and how that this may not always be viewed as a virtue in situ by those in receipt of such straightforwardness. The decision to remove this item was not on a moral basis of whether straightforwardness *should* be interpreted as positive (virtuous) or negative (vicious). Rather, it was omitted to

lessen the potential for mixed interpretations within a statistical model of POC, as supported by the qualitative evidence of this possibility. Straightforwardness seems to possess a complexity and ambiguity that ordinal survey response options would be unable to appropriately capture.

6.2.3.2. Principal component analysis

Following the procedure of Pallant (2020), PCA with Oblimin rotation and Kaiser normalisation was performed on the 17 positive organisational characteristics mentioned by the interviewees. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) value of 0.929 (≥ 0.6), a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value ($p < 0.001$), and multiple correlation coefficients ≥ 0.3 verified that the data was suitable for PCA. Initial inspection of eigenvalues according to Kaiser's criterion of ≥ 1 indicated that a two-component solution was the most appropriate dimension reduction, explaining 64.95% percent of the total variance in the dataset. Examination of the screeplot supported this, with two components above the inflection point on the graph. Monte Carlo parallel analysis (Watkins, 2000) also supported the two-component solution, with only the eigenvalues for the first two components exceeding the criterion values produced by simulation. A correlation of 0.310 between the two principal components supported the choice of Oblimin rotation over Varimax (Pallant, 2020). Table 6.5 shows the resultant pattern matrix of the two revalidated components of POC.

Table 6.5. Pattern matrix of the 17 POCs

Characteristic (<i>associated virtue</i>)	Component	
	1	2
Trustworthy (<i>integrity</i>)	0.920	
Reliable (<i>conscientiousness</i>)	0.916	
Honest (<i>integrity</i>)	0.900	
Open (<i>warmth</i>)	0.884	
Supportive (<i>empathy</i>)	0.869	
Pleasant (<i>warmth</i>)	0.830	
Friendly (<i>warmth</i>)	0.795	
Socially-responsible (<i>integrity</i>)	0.761	
Secure (<i>conscientiousness</i>)	0.746	
Concerned (<i>empathy</i>)	0.718	
Exciting (<i>zeal</i>)	0.638	0.309
Innovative (<i>zeal</i>)	0.637	0.331
Leading (<i>courage</i>)	0.615	0.396
Hardworking (<i>conscientiousness</i>)	0.528	0.366
Proud (<i>conscientiousness</i>)	0.428	0.369
Ambitious (<i>courage</i>)		0.872
Achievement-oriented (<i>courage</i>)		0.814

Extraction method: PCA

Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser normalisation

Rotation converged in 5 iterations

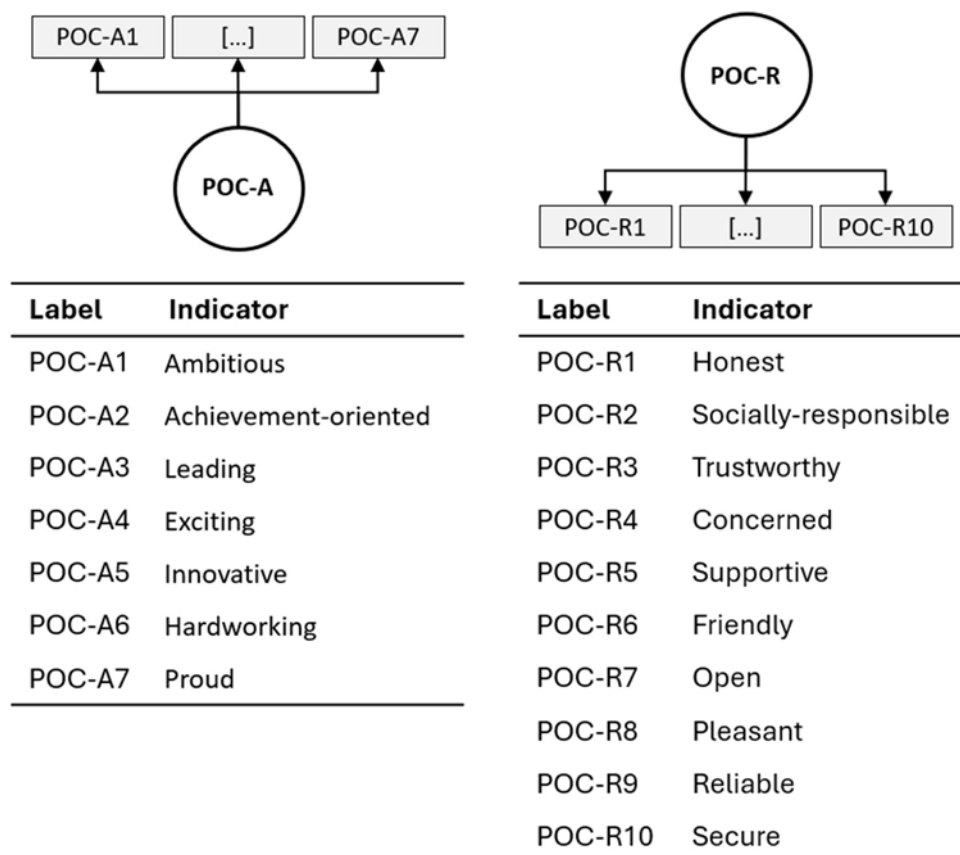
As can be seen in Table 6.5, some of these characteristics load onto both components. This is common to see in PCA (Pallant, 2020), and is to be expected with related components of a broader concept (character). Despite this, it is possible to infer from this analysis two distinct categories of characteristics. Where the descriptors *exciting*, *innovative*, *leading*, *hardworking*, *proud*, *ambitious*, and *achievement-oriented* comprise the indicators of the second component, these appear to be the more ‘aspirational’ characteristics of an organisation (Chun, 2017: 870). Any organisation aspiring to excellence would require the formative traits of strong ambition, achievement orientation, work ethic, and innovativeness to thrive in a competitive business ecosystem. Through this, an aspirational organisation may be fortunate enough to become leading in its field, proud of its track record, and hopefully also an exciting business to work for and witness.

Distinct from the aspirational characteristics, there are 10 remaining characteristics that loaded only onto the first component: *trustworthy*, *reliable*, *honest*, *open*, *supportive*,

pleasant, friendly, socially-responsible, secure, and concerned. These appear to collectively reflect the “relational” character of an organisation.

Organisational trustworthiness and reliability are foundations of dependability, while honesty and openness are vital for transparent and effective communication. Further, an organisation that shows supportiveness, pleasantness, and friendliness naturally primes nurturing and inclusive environments, wherein people can feel safe and secure in work. Finally, an organisation that demonstrates a sense of social-responsibility, and therefore concern for its people, is one that evidently prioritises building and maintaining strong, positive relationships with its workforce. It is upon this basis that the two constructs of positive aspirational organisational character (POC-A) and positive relational organisational character (POC-R) were formed, as shown in Figure 6.3 below.

Figure 6.3. POC-A and POC-R measurement models



6.3. Evolution of the structural model

Due to the evolutionary nature of modelling (Wold, 1982; 1985), and in light of the establishment of POC-A and POC-R as distinct constructs, the original arrow scheme presented in Figure 3.1. (Chapter 3) and associated hypotheses stated in Table 4.2 (Chapter 4) were updated to accommodate separate potential mediating pathways for each of these variables. These are shown below in Figure 6.4 and Table 6.6.

Figure 6.4. Updated structural model

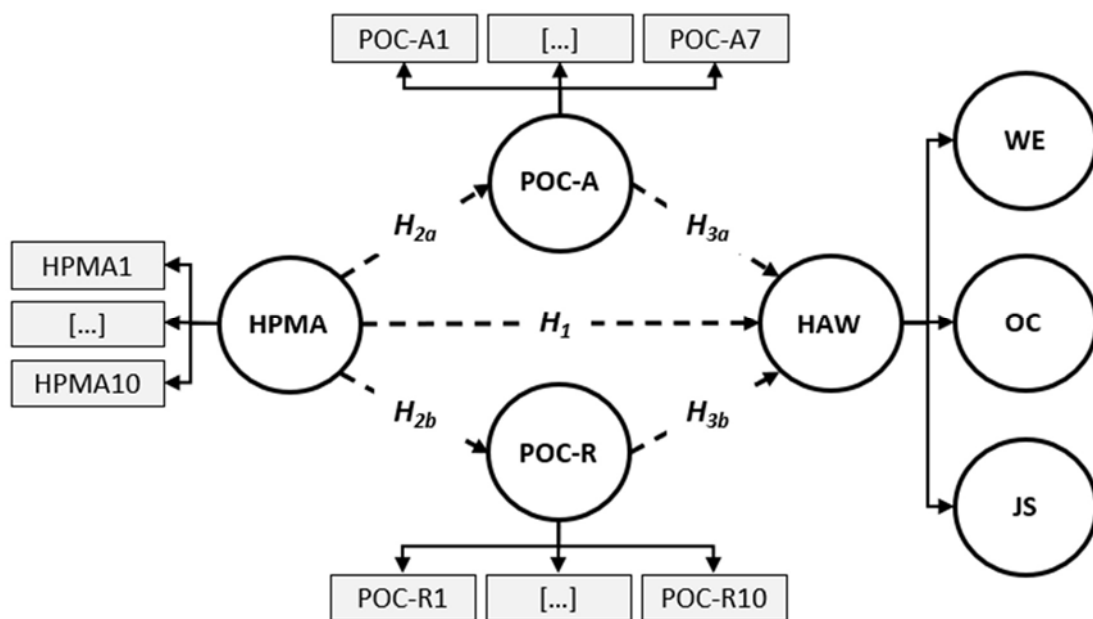


Table 6.6. Updated hypotheses

Testable hypotheses	
H_1	Perceived HPMA is directly positively related to employee HAW.
H_{2a}	Perceived HPMA is directly positively related to perceived POC-A.
H_{2b}	Perceived HPMA is directly positively related to perceived POC-R.
H_{3a}	Perceived POC-A is directly positively related to employee HAW.
H_{3b}	Perceived POC-R is directly positively related to employee HAW.
H_{ma}	Subject to H_{2a} and H_{3a} being confirmed, perceived POC-A complementarily mediates the positive effect of HPMA on HAW.
H_{mb}	Subject to H_{2b} and H_{3b} being confirmed, perceived POC-R complementarily mediates the positive effect of HPMA on HAW.

6.4. Evaluation of the measurement models

Once all constructs were established, before evaluating the structural model, the reliability and validity of the measurement models for each construct were assessed. The following subsections detail the evaluation of indicator communality, construct reliability, and both convergent and discriminant validity.

6.4.1. Indicator communality and construct reliability and validity

Establishing a reliable reflective measurement model necessitates assessing the reliability of its composite indicators. This involves ensuring that the latent construct shares communality with its items (as indicated by high outer loadings), while also achieving acceptable levels of internal consistency, composite reliability, and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2022).

Ideally, in reflectively specified models, items should load onto their designated construct with a bivariate correlation ≥ 0.708 , as this shows that $> 50\%$ of an indicator's variance can be explained by the construct (Hair et al., 2019). However, to maintain a construct's underpinning content validity, if an outer loading is ≥ 0.4 (yet < 0.708) and the measurement model meets or exceeds established thresholds of internal consistency (Cronbach's α), composite reliability (ρ_A and ρ_c), and convergent validity (average variance extracted, AVE), then it is recommended that such items are retained (Hair et al., 2022).

The rationale for assessing construct reliability by way of Cronbach's α and two further measures of composite reliability (ρ_A and ρ_c) is because the assumption of Cronbach's α , that all items load equally onto the construct (i.e., they are unweighted or *tau*-equivalent), may underestimate the construct's reliability (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2022). Conversely to Cronbach's α , ρ_c may overestimate the construct's reliability, which suggests that a construct's true reliability sits between these extremes (Hair et al., 2022). Therefore, Dijkstra and Henseler's (2015) proposed alternative reliability coefficient, ρ_A , which typically falls between Cronbach's α and ρ_c , is taken to be a more accurate measure of a construct's reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

As is shown in the following two subsections, all indicators loaded onto their construct above the minimum threshold of ≥ 0.4 and all constructs performed sufficiently well in other

measures. Therefore, as scale reduction was not the priority, in accordance with the protocol of Hair et al. (2022), these items were retained to maintain content validity.

6.4.1.1. Outer loadings

Outer loadings represent the extent to which indicators correlate with the construct to which they are attributed. These can range from -1.0 to +1.0. Values closer to +/-1.0 indicate a stronger correlation between the item and the latent construct. As all indicators loaded onto their target construct above the accepted minimum threshold of ≥ 0.4 and did not appear to detract from overall construct reliability and validity, they were retained for their content. The outer loadings for all constructs in the lower-order structural model are presented in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7. Outer loadings for HPMa, POC-A, POC-R, HAW, work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction

	HPMA	POC-A	POC-R	HAW	WE	OC	JS
HPMA1	0.837						
HPMA2	0.819						
HPMA3	0.841						
HPMA4	0.467						
HPMA5	0.894						
HPMA6	0.548						
HPMA7	0.846						
HPMA8	0.633						
HPMA9	0.849						
HPMA10	0.822						
POC-A1		0.553					
POC-A2		0.456					
POC-A3		0.864					
POC-A4		0.824					
POC-A5		0.856					
POC-A6		0.738					
POC-A7		0.686					
POC-R1			0.879				
POC-R2			0.754				
POC-R3			0.896				
POC-R4			0.709				
POC-R5			0.864				
POC-R6			0.800				
POC-R7			0.844				
POC-R8			0.828				
POC-R9			0.904				
POC-R10			0.752				
HAW1_WE				0.894			
HAW2_OC				0.901			
HAW3_JS				0.826			
WE1					0.886		
WE2					0.832		
WE3					0.625		
OC1						0.806	
OC2						0.886	
OC3						0.917	
JS1							0.797
JS2							0.802
JS3							0.889

6.4.1.2. Construct reliability and validity

The *reliability* of a measurement model is defined by its internal consistency. In the context of PLS-SEM this is determined by Cronbach's α and composite reliability (ρ_A and ρ_c) values ≥ 0.7 . The *validity* of a measurement model is determined by its convergent validity (AVE), which denotes the extent of shared variance (i.e., communality) among indicators of a construct (Hair et al., 2022). Values of AVE should be ≥ 0.5 .

As can be seen in Table 6.8 below, all models achieved the requisite standards of construct reliability and validity except work engagement, which had a Cronbach's α value slightly below the established threshold (0.694). In the knowledge that Cronbach's α can underestimate reliability, it is noted that work engagement achieved acceptable ρ_A and ρ_c composite reliability (0.754 and 0.829) and AVE (0.622). Despite the marginally lower than desired Cronbach's α for work engagement, where it was subsequently combined with organisational commitment and job satisfaction to reflect HAW, it can be seen from the strong reliability of HAW (Cronbach's α : 0.847; ρ_A : 0.860; ρ_c : 0.907) and high convergent validity (AVE: 0.765) that integrating work engagement in the HCM of HAW did not compromise the integrity of the measurement model.

Table 6.8. Construct reliability and validity of HPMA, POC-A, POC-R, HAW, work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction

	Construct reliability			Construct validity
	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability (ρ_A)	Composite reliability (ρ_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
HPMA	0.918	0.940	0.933	0.591
POC-A	0.848	0.895	0.882	0.527
POC-R	0.947	0.952	0.955	0.681
HAW	0.847	0.860	0.907	0.765
WE	0.694	0.754	0.829	0.622
OC	0.840	0.854	0.904	0.759
JS	0.775	0.794	0.869	0.690

6.4.2. Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity determines the extent to which constructs within a model are empirically distinct from one another (Farrell, 2010). Traditionally, this has been assessed by the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). However, research has since highlighted substantive issues in the efficacy of this validation statistic (Henseler et al., 2015). For this reason, Henseler et al. (2015) proposed the HTMT ratio as a more accurate determinant of discriminant validity. Both analyses are reported below.

6.4.2.1. Fornell-Larcker criterion

The Fornell-Larcker criterion works on the premise that a construct should share more variance with its indicators than with other constructs in the structural model. According to this statistic, a construct's correlation with any other construct should be less than the square root of its AVE (Hair et al., 2022).

The results of this test are shown below in Table 6.9. Values along the top diagonal line correspond to the square root of each construct's respective AVE, while all other values refer to correlations between the constructs denoted. As can be seen from these data, discriminant validity according to this metric was established in all constructs except POC-A, which reveals a slightly higher correlation with POC-R (0.745) than the square root of its AVE (0.726).

Table 6.9. Fornell-Larcker criterion results

	WE	OC	JS	HPMA	POC-A	POC-R	HAW
WE	0.789						
OC	0.711	0.871					
JS	0.604	0.628	0.831				
HPMA	0.643	0.628	0.563	0.769			
POC-A	0.627	0.641	0.437	0.743	0.726		
POC-R	0.710	0.700	0.544	0.760	0.745	0.825	
HAW	*	*	*	0.699	0.655	0.750	0.875

*Not applicable as WE, OC, JS are the LOCs of HAW and therefore were not compared.

A possible explanation for this can be inferred from the combination of the PCA performed in the initial establishment of the POC construct from Chun's (2005) original VEC scale and Martin's (2021) observations from similar analyses. In the PCA, it was found that while the indicators comprising POC-A loaded onto a second component that POC-R indicators did not, the majority of POC-A indicators also loaded onto the first component (POC-R). In their analyses, Martin (2021) noted the potential for a "halo effect" whereby more positive employee ratings of their organisation's *empathy* would coincide with more positive ratings of its *courage*. In the context of the current investigation, the presence of a "halo effect" could, for instance lead an employee to be more inclined to view their organisation as *ambitious* if they felt them already to be *supportive* while attending to other important aspects of the business (e.g., profit-maximisation). As POC-A and POC-R achieved acceptable HTMT ratio scores (as shown in the next subsection), it was decided that these conceptually related constructs were sufficiently distinct from one another to be entered into the structural model as separate constructs.

6.4.2.2. Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio

Although the Fornell-Larcker criterion raises a question regarding the discriminant validity of POC-A and POC-R, the HTMT ratio results suggest that all constructs in the structural model were acceptably distinct from one another. This statistic works by comparing the correlation of indicators across different constructs to the correlations of indicators within the same construct (Hair et al., 2022). There are two generally accepted thresholds for HTMT, one for more conceptually distinct constructs (< 0.85), and one for more conceptually similar constructs (< 0.90) (Henseler et al., 2015).

As can be seen from the table below, the HTMT ratios between all variables were lower than the more conservative (< 0.85) threshold, except for that of work engagement and organisational commitment, for which the result was 0.90 (when rounded to the hundredth level). As work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction were designed in this model to be the three reflective LOCs of HAW, and the indicators of reflectively specified models are expected to be closely correlated (Hair et al., 2022), the HTMT ratio between these values being marginally above the threshold was considered acceptable for the HCM of HAW. Further, as indicators of a reflectively specified construct should share a

reasonable degree of similarity, this may provide additional support for the integration of work engagement and organisational commitment as reflective indicators of HAW as a higher-order construct (Fisher, 2010). The HTMT ratio results are presented below (Table 6.10).

Table 6.10. HTMT ratio results

	HPMA	POC-A	POC-R	HAW	WE	OC
POC-A	0.800					
POC-R	0.794	0.762				
HAW	0.761	0.691	0.825			
WE	0.752	0.735	0.846	*		
OC	0.689	0.696	0.846	*	0.904	
JS	0.628	0.480	0.625	*	0.808	0.783

*Not applicable as WE, OC, JS are the LOCs of HAW and therefore were not compared.

A further measure of discriminant validity beyond the above thresholds was obtained by way of bootstrap-derived HTMT confidence intervals ($HTMT_{inference}$, Franke and Sarstedt, 2019). The interest of the $HTMT_{inference}$ is to see whether the HTMT ratio is below 1.00 (least conservative threshold), 0.90, or 0.85 (most conservative threshold) in 95% of instances (i.e., comparable to $p < 0.05$). This test was performed on the second stage of analysis with the HCM of HAW in the model.

Values < 1.00 indicate that two constructs are distinct from one another in 95% of instances, while the lower thresholds provide greater evidence of distinctiveness between constructs. As Table 6.11 below shows, in 95% of instances no constructs in the structural model had a value ≥ 0.90 , which is indicative of there being strong discriminant validity among constructs.

Table 6.11. Bootstrap-derived bias corrected HTMT ratio confidence intervals

	Original sample	Sample mean	Bias	5.00%	95.00%
HPMA ↔ POC-A	0.800	0.799	0.000	0.695	0.883
HPMA ↔ POC-R	0.794	0.792	-0.001	0.700	0.864
HPMA ↔ HAW	0.761	0.761	0.000	0.662	0.841
POC-A ↔ POC-R	0.762	0.763	0.001	0.658	0.846
POC-A ↔ HAW	0.691	0.697	0.006	0.573	0.779
POC-R ↔ HAW	0.825	0.824	-0.002	0.737	0.891

As the measurement models for their respective constructs were found to have largely met acceptable standards of reliability and validity, with only minor deviations regarding discriminant validity, the modelling process progressed onto the evaluation of the structural model, as detailed in the next section.

6.5. Evaluation of the structural model

After the construct measurement models have been confirmed as reliable and valid, the next stage of the model evaluation process is to assess the structural model. This entails an examination of how the constructs interconnect in the hypothesised network of relationships. The first stage of this process is to check for potential collinearity that may lead to biased path coefficients (Hair et al., 2022). Once collinearity is confirmed as being below a critical level, focus turns to the significance and relevance of the path coefficients that represent structural model relationships (Hair et al., 2022). Thereafter, as the orientation of PLS-SEM is ‘causal-predictive’, the explanatory and predictive ability of the model is assessed (Hair et al., 2022: 187).

6.5.1. Collinearity

To avoid issues arising from collinearity among the predictor variables in the structural model, each predictor construct should have a variance inflation factor (VIF) lower than 5, but preferably lower than 3 (Hair et al., 2022). As can be seen in Table 6.12 below, all VIF values are under the preferred lower threshold, suggesting no cause for multicollinearity concern.

Table 6.12. Collinearity (VIF) statistics for the inner model

Relationship	VIF
HPMA → POC-A	1.000
HPMA → POC-R	1.000
HPMA → HAW	2.844
POC-A → HAW	2.696
POC-R → HAW	2.860

6.5.2. Significance and relevance of structural model relationships

Analysing the structural model relationships involves examining the direct effects between constructs, as well as the indirect and total effect of HPMA on HAW via the mediators of POC-A and POC-R.

6.5.2.1. Direct effects

As shown in Table 6.13 below, there was a statistically significant positive direct association between HPMA and POC-A, HPMA and POC-R, HPMA and HAW, POC-R and HAW, but not between POC-A and HAW. This indicates that HPMA and POC-R have direct and positive effects on HAW, with POC-R having the strongest effect (HPMA → HAW: 0.258; POC-R → HAW: 0.470).

Table 6.13. Direct effects of all structural model relationships

Relationship	Path coefficients	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistic	<i>p</i> value
HPMA → POC-A	0.743	0.745	0.041	18.095	0.000
HPMA → POC-R	0.760	0.762	0.040	19.134	0.000
HPMA → HAW	0.258	0.261	0.092	2.792	0.005
POC-A → HAW	0.113	0.111	0.092	1.224	0.221
POC-R → HAW	0.470	0.470	0.101	4.635	0.000

The significance (*p*) values along with sizes of positive coefficients shown in Table 6.13 above suggest that both an employee's perception of HPMA in their organisation and their

perception of its relational character serve as predictors of their combined engagement, commitment, and satisfaction (i.e., happiness) at work, with the latter being the stronger predictor. Perceived HPMA was, however, strongly related to POC-R (0.760, $p < 0.001$) and POC-A (0.743, $p < 0.001$), which, given the significant relationship between POC-R and HAW, suggests that perceived HPMA is an influential variable in employee HAW. This is further shown in the next subsection through the examination of the indirect and total effects of HPMA on HAW via the mediation of POC-R.

The weakest and only non-significant association within the model, between POC-A and HAW (0.113, $p > 0.05$), suggests that an employee's perception of the aspirational character of their organisation is not a significant determining factor of their HAW when evaluations of HPMA and POC-R are factored into the equation.

6.5.2.2. Indirect and total effect of HPMA on HAW

As shown in Table 6.14. below, HPMA had a total effect on HAW of 0.442 ($p < 0.001$). This effect was partially conveyed by the complementary mediating effect of POC-R. The significant indirect effect of HPMA on HAW via POC-R (0.358, $p < 0.001$) indicates that HPMA impacts HAW significantly through its influence on POC-R.

Table 6.14. Indirect effects and total effect of HPMA on HAW

Relationship	Path coefficients	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistic	p value
<i>Indirect effects (HPMA → HAW)</i>					
Via POC-A	0.084	0.082	0.068	1.228	0.220
Via POC-R	0.358	0.358	0.081	4.389	0.000
<i>Total effect</i>					
HPMA → HAW	0.442	0.440	0.075	5.892	0.000

Since the indirect effect of POC-R is greater than the direct effect of HPMA on HAW (0.258, $p < 0.01$), assuming that management activity is a formative component in the development of employees' views about their organisation, this suggests that much of the influence of

HPMA on employee HAW can be explained by how it enhances the perception of relational organisational character. The non-significant indirect effect via POC-A (0.084, $p > 0.05$) indicates that though HPMA is relevant to the generation of employee perceptions regarding the aspirational character of their organisation, this does not bear substantively on their HAW.

6.5.3. Model explanatory power (in-sample prediction)

Explanatory power refers to the ability of a model 'to fit the data at hand by quantifying the strength of association indicated by the PLS path model' (Hair et al., 2022: 194-195). Two values are commonly used for this purpose. The first is the coefficient of determination (R^2), which reflects the degree of variance in an endogenous construct that is explained by associated predecessor (predictor) model constructs; the second is the f^2 effect size, which reflects the change in a construct's R^2 when a predecessor is removed from the model (Hair et al., 2022). These are reported in turn below.

6.5.3.1. Coefficient of determination (R^2)

In Table 6.15 below, R^2 and R^2 adjusted values are presented. As these differ only marginally, it suggests that there is no significant overfitting. This is to be expected for a simple SEM with only 4 constructs. However, with the reasonably high level of explained variance of endogenous constructs, it also suggests that this parsimonious structure is sufficient and well-fit. Only R^2 adjusted values are discussed henceforth, such that comparisons can be drawn with models of varying complexity in future research.

Ideally, R^2 adjusted values should be interpreted in context of previous research. However, unfortunately, in the two prior investigations examining the broader and closely related construct of HPO (i.e., de Waal, 2018; Mroueh and de Waal, 2020), R^2 values with respect to HAW were not reported. In lieu of this information, guideline values of 0.25-0.49, 0.50-0.74, and 0.75-1.00 which respectively signify 'weak', 'moderate', and 'substantial' explanatory power of antecedent variables can be used (Hair et al., 2019: 11).

The R^2 adjusted result show that, in combination, HPMA, POC-A, and POC-R explain 60% of the variance in HAW. Further, HPMA alone can explain 55% of the variance in POC-A and

57.6% of the variance in POC-R. In line with the above guiding values, this suggests that perceptions of management actions and organisational character together account for a moderate proportion of the variance in HAW, while perceptions of management actions alone explain a comparable degree of variance in perceived organisational character.

Table 6.15. Coefficient of determination (R^2) values

Construct	R^2	R^2 adjusted
POC-A	0.552 ($p = 0.000$)	0.550 ($p = 0.000$)
POC-R	0.578 ($p = 0.000$)	0.576 ($p = 0.000$)
HAW	0.607 ($p = 0.000$)	0.600 ($p = 0.000$)

6.5.3.2. Effect size (f^2)

A rule-of-thumb for f^2 effect sizes is that values greater than 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 demonstrate small, medium, and large effects, respectively (Cohen, 1988; Hair et al., 2019). The results in Table 6.16 below indicate that perceived HPMA has a large and significant effect upon perceived POC-A (1.234, $p < 0.001$) and POC-R (1.371, $p < 0.001$), but a small and non-significant effect upon HAW (0.059, $p > 0.05$).

Therefore, while HPMA was found to have a significant direct effect upon HAW in terms of the strength of the path coefficient between these variables, the small, non-significant f^2 effect size of this relationship indicates that HPMA accounts for a relatively small part of the overall variability in HAW. Given that POC-R had a moderate and significant effect upon HAW (0.197, $p < 0.05$), and acts as a partial complementary mediator, this illustrates the important role that employees' perceptions of the relational character of their organisation plays in the HPMA-HAW relationship. The results also suggest that POC-A did not have a significant effect upon HAW (0.012, $p > 0.05$).

Table 6.16. Effect size (f^2) values

Relationship	f^2 effect sizes
HPMA → POC-A	1.234 ($p = 0.000$)
HPMA → POC-R	1.371 ($p = 0.000$)
HPMA → HAW	0.059 ($p = 0.201$)
POC-A → HAW	0.012 ($p = 0.606$)
POC-R → HAW	0.197 ($p = 0.032$)

6.5.4. Model predictive power (out-of-sample prediction)

To inform managerial decision-making, models require an assessment of the generalisability of the findings beyond the sample upon which the model is based (Hair and Sarstedt, 2021; Sarstedt and Danks, 2022). In PLS-SEM, two approaches are used to determine the predictive power of a model: $PLS_{predict}$ (Shmueli et al., 2016; Shmueli et al., 2019) and the cross-validated predictive ability test (CVPAT, Lienggaard et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2023).

The $PLS_{predict}$ and CVPAT processes work on the premise of k -fold cross-validation (Hair et al., 2022). This entails the overall dataset being split into k roughly equally sized subsets, with $k-1$ subsets forming a training sample to predict the remaining holdout sample. By repeating this process k times (once for each fold), each subset serves as the holdout sample in at least one iteration. To prevent potentially abnormal solutions that arise from extreme segmentation of training and holdout samples, this algorithm is run multiple times. It is recommended that the algorithm be run 10 times (Hair et al., 2022).

When determining the appropriate number of folds (k), it is important to ensure that the training sample has sufficient power to detect the smallest effects. Using the inverse square root method of sample size determination (Kock and Hadaya, 2018), based on the smallest significant coefficient in the PLS path model (HPMA → HAW), the training sample would require a minimum of 94 observations ($\alpha = 5\%$; $1-\beta = 80\%$). Following the recommended 10-fold structure ensured that the training sample was above this minimum value with at least 165 observations.

The results from the $PLS_{predict}$ and CVPAT analyses are contextualised by comparison against naïve benchmarks. For $PLS_{predict}$, these include the $Q^2_{predict}$ value, which applies the mean value of the training sample to predict the holdout sample's outcomes, as well as the mean

absolute error (MAE) or root mean square error (RMSE) of the PLS model, which are compared to equivalent values derived from a linear regression model (LM). A positive Q^2_{predict} value entails that the PLS model has better predictive performance than simply using training sample mean values, while lower PLS-SEM RMSE or MAE values than those derived from a LM suggest that theorised model pathways have a greater predictive performance than a LM (Shmueli et al., 2019).

As an alternative measure, the CVPAT examines the degree of predictive error with two naïve benchmark measures that can be likened to the Q^2_{predict} and LM benchmarks of PLS_{predict} . The CVPAT calculates the model's prediction error to determine an average loss value. This value is then compared to the average loss values derived from indicator averages (IA) and a LM, the latter of which is considered the more conservative of the two benchmarks (Sharma et al., 2023). PLS_{predict} and CVPAT results are presented in the following two subsections.

6.5.4.1. PLS_{predict}

The PLS_{predict} analysis provides mixed results regarding the out-of-sample predictive power of the model. Firstly, as is shown in Table 6.17 below, the Q^2_{predict} values being greater than 0 for all endogenous indicators suggests that the model has a reasonable degree predictive relevance. This aligns with a commonly cited rule of thumb that values greater than 0, 0.25, and 0.5 reflect small, medium, and large predictive relevance, respectively (Hair et al., 2019). Focusing on the Q^2_{predict} values of the primary indicators of interest – reflections of employee HAW – it can be interpreted that the PLS-path model from HPMA to work engagement (0.401), organisational commitment (0.385), and job satisfaction (0.308) via POC-R has a medium predictive power of these outcomes.

With regards to the RMSE or MAE statistics, it is recommended that the RMSE is interpreted when the distribution of prediction errors appears symmetric (Hair et al., 2022). This (lack of) symmetry can be observed through skewness of the prediction error. In context of the current model, the majority (12) of prediction error skewness (PES) values being lower than ± 0.5 suggest a 'fairly symmetrical' error distribution, while 7 were 'moderately' skewed (± 0.5 -1) and 1 'highly' skewed (>1) (Bulmer, 1979: 63). Because of this varied skewness

among indicators, both the RMSE and MAE statistics provide relatively comparable information. As is also shown in Table 6.17, the majority (13) of RMSE and MAE values are lower in the PLS path model than the naïve LM (7). From this it can be concluded that the PLS model possessed an overall medium predictive power of POC-A and POC-R (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2022). However, it should be noted that the PLS model was not superior to LM for predicting organisational commitment and job satisfaction.

Table 6.17. Q^2_{predict} values, comparative PLS-SEM and LM RMSE and MAE values, and prediction error skewness (PES)

Variable	Q^2_{predict}	PLS RMSE	LM RMSE	Superior	PLS MAE	LM MAE	Superior	PES
POC-A overall	0.540							
POC-A1	0.065	0.682	0.659	LM	0.507	0.484	LM	-1.271
POC-A2	0.049	0.778	0.698	LM	0.645	0.530	LM	-0.796
POC-A3	0.461	0.705	0.747	PLS	0.550	0.571	PLS	-0.197
POC-A4	0.422	0.798	0.819	PLS	0.632	0.642	PLS	-0.272
POC-A5	0.401	0.828	0.816	LM	0.631	0.635	PLS	-0.588
POC-A6	0.248	0.714	0.754	PLS	0.540	0.559	PLS	-0.706
POC-A7	0.236	0.728	0.759	PLS	0.567	0.584	PLS	-0.771
POC-R overall	0.569							
POC-R1	0.455	0.794	0.856	PLS	0.606	0.638	PLS	0.045
POC-R2	0.290	0.840	0.876	PLS	0.648	0.685	PLS	-0.294
POC-R3	0.465	0.821	0.828	PLS	0.637	0.635	LM	-0.135
POC-R4	0.264	0.998	1.029	PLS	0.758	0.781	PLS	-0.593
POC-R5	0.456	0.805	0.800	LM	0.607	0.589	LM	-0.476
POC-R6	0.425	0.680	0.708	PLS	0.511	0.531	PLS	-0.808
POC-R7	0.424	0.843	0.842	LM	0.670	0.663	LM	-0.223
POC-R8	0.343	0.815	0.889	PLS	0.609	0.662	PLS	-0.337
POC-R9	0.417	0.804	0.835	PLS	0.627	0.644	PLS	-0.044
POC-R10	0.285	0.831	0.859	PLS	0.648	0.668	PLS	-0.381
HAW overall	0.481							
HAW1_WE	0.401	0.779	0.812	PLS	0.605	0.626	PLS	0.070
HAW2_OC	0.385	0.789	0.786	LM	0.609	0.593	LM	-0.412
HAW3_JS	0.308	0.837	0.821	LM	0.630	0.609	LM	-0.570

6.5.4.2. Cross-validated predictive ability test (CVPAT)

The CVPAT results mirror the mixed picture rendered from PLS_{predict}. As shown in Table 6.18 below, when compared to the less conservative IA benchmark, the PLS path model predicted all endogenous constructs well. However, as shown thereafter, there was no significant difference between the PLS and LM for predicting POC-A and HAW, which indicates similar performance. For POC-R, however, the PLS model significantly outperformed the LM. Overall, the PLS model showed a slight, but not statistically significant, improvement over the LM.

When considered in context of the PLS_{predict} results, where 7 of the RMSE and MAE values were not comparatively better in the PLS path model than the LM, this nonsignificant difference between the PLS model and LM is to be expected. A likely reason for this comparability between PLS and LM results is the relative simplicity of the path model comprising only five parameters and a single significant complementary mediating pathway.

Table 6.18, below, shows the CVPAT calculated PLS-SEM path model predictive capabilities when compared to IA and a LM. Negative loss values indicate that the PLS path model performed better than the respective benchmarks.

Table 6.18. CVPAT – PLS-SEM v IA and LM predictions

	Average loss difference	t value	p value
<i>PLS-SEM v IA</i>			
POC-A	-0.249	5.151	0.000
POC-R	-0.425	5.068	0.000
HAW	-0.369	4.959	0.000
Overall	-0.355	5.611	0.000
<i>PLS-SEM v LM</i>			
POC-A	-0.004	0.246	0.806
POC-R	-0.049	2.303	0.022
HAW	-0.007	0.222	0.825
Overall	-0.027	1.839	0.067

6.6. Support of hypotheses and potential significance

The support of the hypotheses set out in Section 6.3 are summarised in Figure 6.5 and Table 6.19 below. The modelling findings reveal a significant direct effect of perceived HPMA on employee HAW, which supports H_1 . This outcome advances previous research by de Waal (2018) and Mroueh and de Waal (2020), which explored broader relationships between overall HPO perceptions and employee HAW.

Moreover, the results indicate a significant indirect effect of HPMA on HAW, mediated through POC-R, as posited in H_{mb} and supported by confirmation of H_{2b} and H_{3b} . This indirect effect constitutes the majority of HPMA's total effect on HAW ($0.760 \times 0.470 = 0.357$, surpassing 0.258), which highlights the important mediating role of perceived relational organisational character. This suggests that employees' perceptions of their organisation as, for instance, *honest* and *reliable* are more personally impactful than it being, say, *innovative* and *proud*. While there were strong and significant associations between HPMA and both POC-A and POC-R, which support H_{2a} and H_{2b} respectively, the non-significant association between POC-A and HAW indicates that POC-A does not mediate the HPMA-HAW relationship, which means that H_{3a} and H_{mb} were not supported.

Figure 6.5. A summary of path coefficients (along lines) and R^2 explained variance of endogenous constructs (within circles)

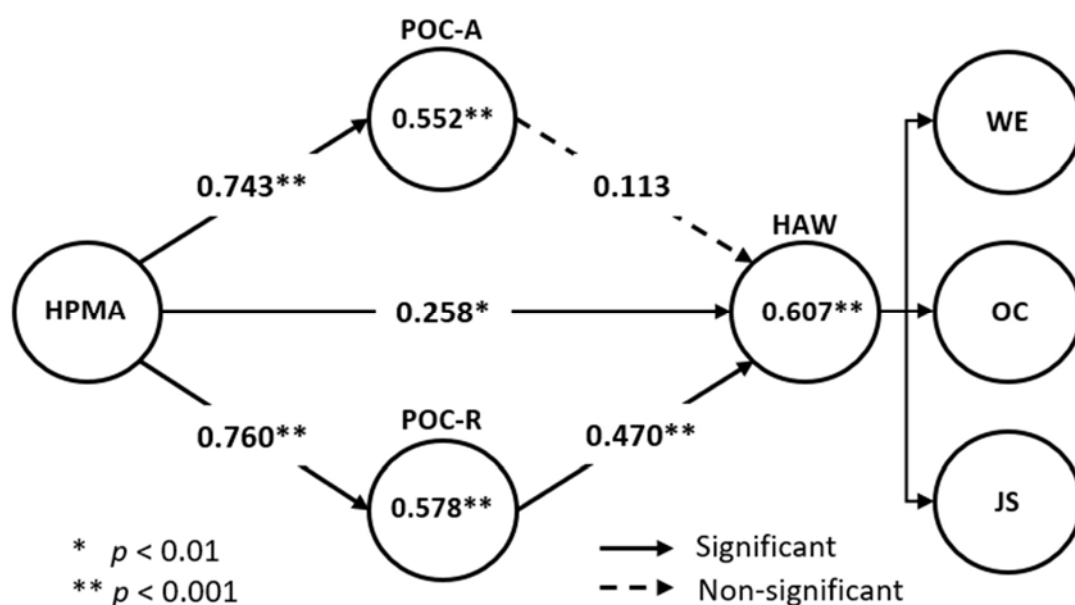


Table 6.19. A summary of hypotheses and whether they are supported by the SEM

Testable hypotheses		
H_1	Perceived HPMA is directly positively related to employee HAW.	Supported
H_{2a}	Perceived HPMA is directly positively related to perceived POC-A.	Supported
H_{2b}	Perceived HPMA is directly positively related to perceived POC-R.	Supported
H_{3a}	Perceived POC-A is directly positively related to employee HAW.	Not supported
H_{3b}	Perceived POC-R is directly positively related to employee HAW.	Supported
H_{ma}	Subject to H_{2a} and H_{3a} being confirmed, perceived POC-A complementarily mediates the positive effect of HPMA on HAW.	Not supported
H_{mb}	Subject to H_{2b} and H_{3b} being confirmed, perceived POC-R complementarily mediates the positive effect of HPMA on HAW.	Supported

The emergence of the indirect effect via POC-R raises an unexpected and intriguing point. Although the original hypotheses anticipated complementary mediation effects from both POC-A and POC-R, the results reveal a more nuanced picture, where an organisation's apparent relational character is more important than its aspirational nature in cultivating a positive employee experience that is beneficial for people and performance. This path (perceived HPMA $\rightarrow$ perceived POC-R $\rightarrow$ HAW) reinforces the importance of organisational character as a determinant of employee well-being and demonstrates how perceptions of management actions translate into broader organisational outcomes.

6.7. Importance-performance map analysis (IPMA)

To deepen the insights obtained from the PLS-SEM results, two IPMAs were conducted. As it is of interest for the management of an organisation to understand what may enhance levels of work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction, both IPMAs were performed with HAW as the target construct. The first examined the 10 variables of HPMA while the second considered the 17 variables of POC-A and POC-R. Each is reported in turn in the subsequent two subsections.

6.7.1. IPMA of HPMA indicators

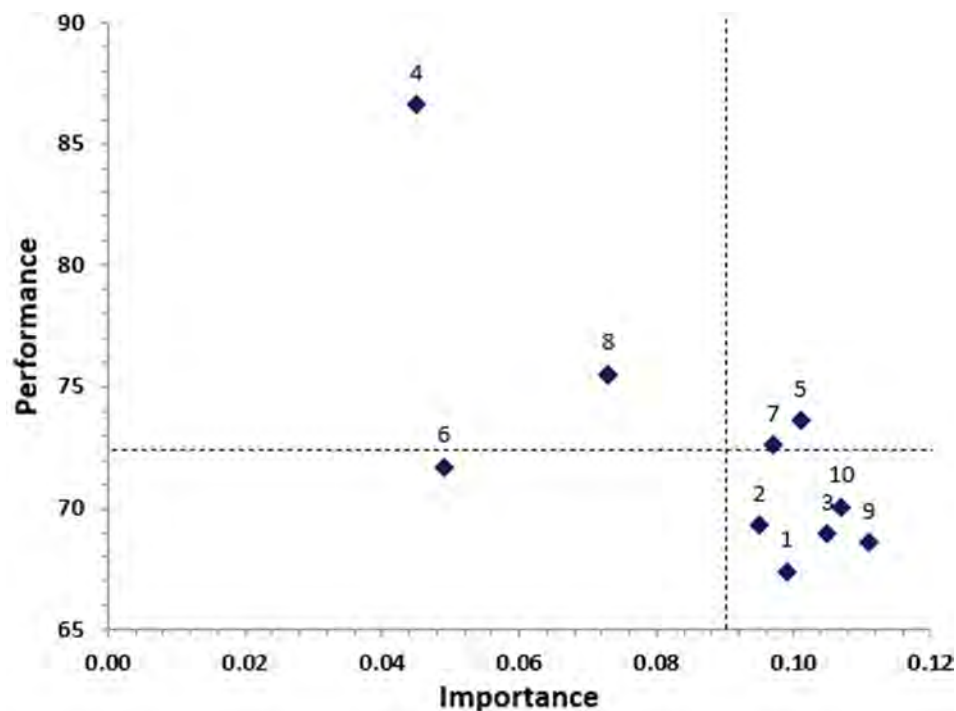
Table 6.20 below shows the 10 HPMA indicators ranked from highest to lowest in terms of their impact upon the target construct of HAW, while Figure 6.6 presents these values graphically along with the indicator importance and performance averages (denoted by the dotted lines).

Table 6.20. The importance and performance values of HPMA indicators ranked by their importance with respect to the target construct of HAW

HPMA	“Management...”	Importance	Performance
9	welcomes change	0.111	68.610
10	inspires org. members to accomplish extraordinary results	0.107	70.067
3	coaches org. members to achieve better results	0.105	68.961
5	applies strong leadership	0.101	73.611
1	applies fast decision making	0.099	67.403
7	frequently engages in a dialogue with employees	0.097	72.617
2	applies fast action taking	0.095	69.324
8	allows making mistakes	0.073	75.531
6	always holds org. members responsible for their results	0.049	71.706
4	focuses on achieving results	0.045	86.618
Average		0.088	72.445

Org. = organisational

Figure 6.6. A graphical representation of the IPMA of HPMA indicators with respect to the target construct of HAW



As can be seen from the rank of importance scores in Table 6.20 and thereafter visualised in Figure 6.6 above, although the employees of Solet generally saw it that their management *focuses on achieving results* (HPMA4) substantially more than any other of the 10 HPMA indicators, doing so appears to have the least effect upon their HAW. Conversely to this, the perception that management *welcomes change* (HPMA9) and *inspires* (HPMA10) and *coaches* (HPMA3) organisational members to perform highly appears to have a relatively more pronounced effect upon employees' HAW. As these areas of action are also where employees were generally more critical of their organisation, in the specific case of Solet, this is where managerial attention may be better directed to maximise positive effects on HAW.

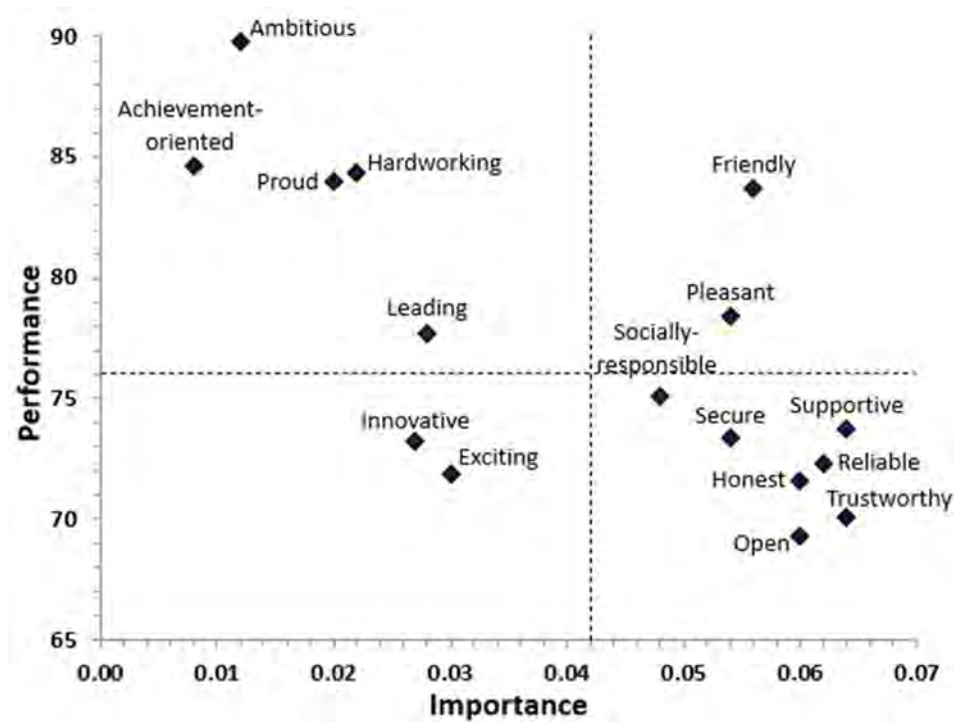
6.7.2. IPMA of POC-A and POC-R indicators

Table 6.21 below shows the 17 POC-A and POC-R indicators ranked from highest to lowest in terms of their impact upon the target construct of HAW, while Figure 6.7 presents these values graphically along with the indicator importance and performance averages (denoted by the dotted lines).

Table 6.21. The importance and performance values of POC-A and POC-R indicators ranked by their importance with respect to the target construct of HAW

POC	“My organisation is...”	Importance	Performance
R5	Supportive	0.064	73.770
R3	Trustworthy	0.064	70.109
R9	Reliable	0.062	72.283
R1	Honest	0.060	71.603
R7	Open	0.060	69.293
R6	Friendly	0.056	83.696
R8	Pleasant	0.054	78.397
R10	Secure	0.054	73.370
R2	Socially-responsible	0.048	75.136
R4	Concerned	0.046	59.783
A4	Exciting	0.030	71.875
A3	Leading	0.028	77.717
A5	Innovative	0.027	73.224
A6	Hardworking	0.022	84.375
A7	Proud	0.020	84.016
A1	Ambitious	0.012	89.810
A2	Achievement-oriented	0.008	84.647
Average		0.042	76.065

Figure 6.7. A graphical representation of the IPMA of POC-A and POC-R indicators with respect to the target construct of HAW



Notable in the rank order of characteristics in Table 6.21, all the POC-R characteristics had a greater impact upon HAW than even the most important POC-A characteristic. Of the POC-A characteristics, interestingly, the organisation being characteristically *exciting* (POC-A4) was the most impactful. This is more important, it seems, than the organisation being *leading* (POC-A3), which is a common characteristic that organisations often aspire to possess (e.g., Solet’s aim ‘to become the number one provider’ in their field, Solet, 2023a: online).

Consistent with this lower rank of importance for the perceived *leading* nature of an organisation from the employee perspective, the least important aspirational organisational characteristics for ensuring HAW were the organisation being *achievement-oriented* (POC-A2) and *ambitious* (POC-A1). These lowest ranking indicators may be linked to the direct results orientation of HPMA4 (*management focuses on achieving results*). These 3 indicators were the highest ranking in terms of performance, but the lowest ranking in their respective lists in terms of impact upon HAW.

From the employee experience perspective, this suggests that an organisation’s evident drive to achieve results is less important than *how* it achieves those results through means

that develop its people's engagement, commitment, and satisfaction, such as *inspiring* (HPMA10) and *coaching* (HPMA3) employees towards them. The highest-ranking relational characteristics in terms of impact upon HAW suggest that this is achieved through activity that first and foremost makes the organisation appear in the employee's mind's eye to be in equal measure *supportive* (POC-R5) and *trustworthy* (POC-R3).

6.8. Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an in-depth examination of the impact of employees' perceptions of management activity upon their organisational performance alignment expressed in terms of HAW. It has also explored the mediating role of perceived organisational character in this relationship. Its findings highlight both the direct and indirect pathways through which perceived HPMA influences HAW, with perceived POC-R emerging as an important complementary mediator.

Further, IPMAs have added depth and detail to these findings, demonstrating high-priority managerial actions and organisational characteristics that more significantly weigh on employee engagement, commitment, and satisfaction. Collectively, these results provide management valuable attention points to focus on in efforts to respond to the performance demands of their organisation through the employee experience.

Building on the insights derived in this chapter, the following chapter shifts focus to a broader and more personal exploration of the employee experience by delving deeper into why employees are drawn to specific organisations, what motivates them to stay, and the reasons they may sooner or later leave. By exploring this question through employees' own narratives and meaningful experiences, the analysis uncovers a nuanced set of factors that influence organisational attachment and retention, which enriches theoretical understanding of employee-organisation interaction.

Chapter 7. Results 3 – Reasons for being in the organisation: a theory of employee self-movement

Recalling from the document analysis in Chapter 5, the senior management of Solet appears to pay significant attention to the experience of its employees as members of the Solet ‘family’ (Solet, 2023a: online). As part of this, the company seems to invest heavily in the holistic experience of being in the organisation, not just working for it. Benefits of working for the company include getting paid to contribute to charitable causes, the chance to upskill professionally, never having to work on your birthday, and space to relax, stay fit, and play (if you are at HQ). However, as established early in the conceptual review of Chapter 2, these initiatives do not always work (Berry et al., 2010; Spence, 2015); people can still experience unhappiness at work – take **Anon** for instance.

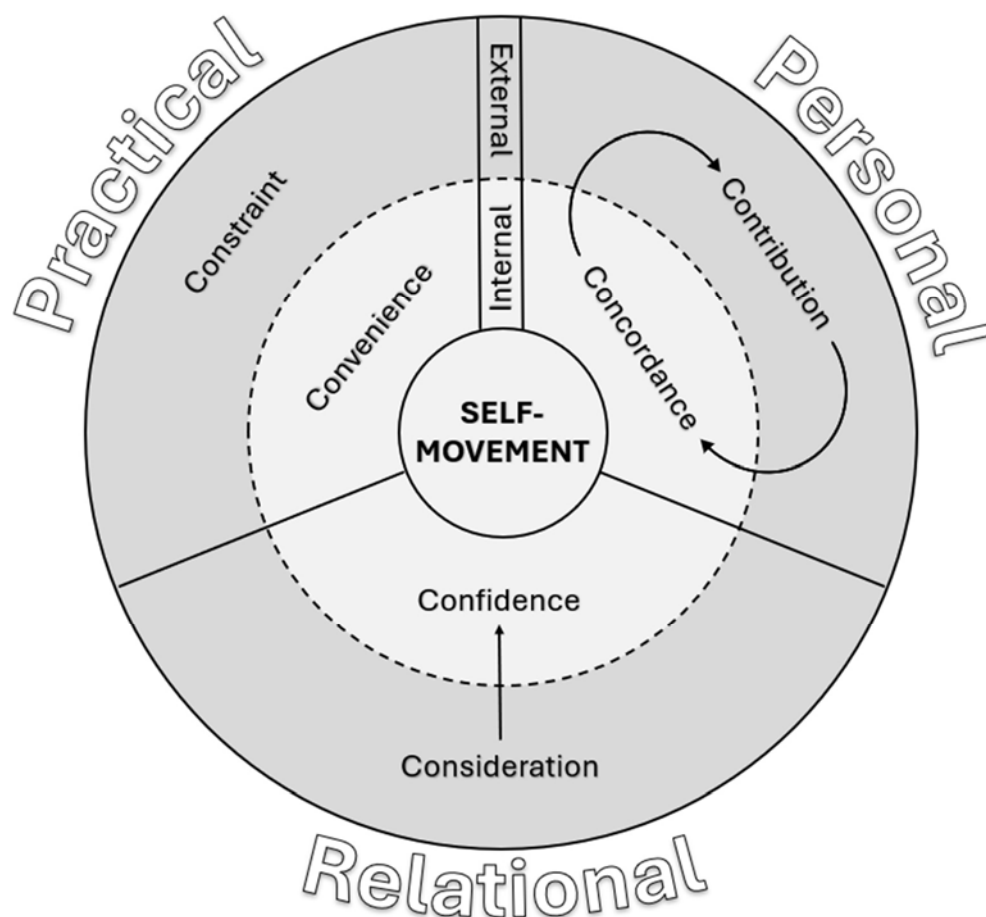
Building upon this, the last chapter demonstrated that employee perceptions of management action are an influential part of the employee experience – an important point to establish when seeking to know how management might be able to augment that perception for the sake of people and performance. To guide management in that pursuit, this chapter explores the underlying factors that bring people to work for a given organisation rather than another, by addressing the question of why employees decide to come to, stay at, and leave their organisation.

By addressing this question from a neutral and open employee experience perspective, six key themes were drawn from the interviewees’ accounts regarding why they work for Solet and how happy they were there. As depicted in Figure 7.1 below, these six themes are conceptualised as “forces” that influence people’s decisions to work for an organisation. Comprising a theory of self-movement, this mix of *practical*, *personal*, and *relational* forces provide management with a richer understanding of the employee experience, and what managers may be able to do in situ to affect these variables for the better.

The ensuing sections of this chapter begin by examining the practical forces of *constraint* and *convenience*. The analysis then moves to the closely intertwined personal forces of *concordance* and *contribution*, before concluding with the seemingly causal effect of

perceived relational *consideration* on the *confidence* people gain to join an organisation and subsequently remain there.

Figure 7.1. The six forces of employee self-movement



7.1. Practical forces: constraint and convenience

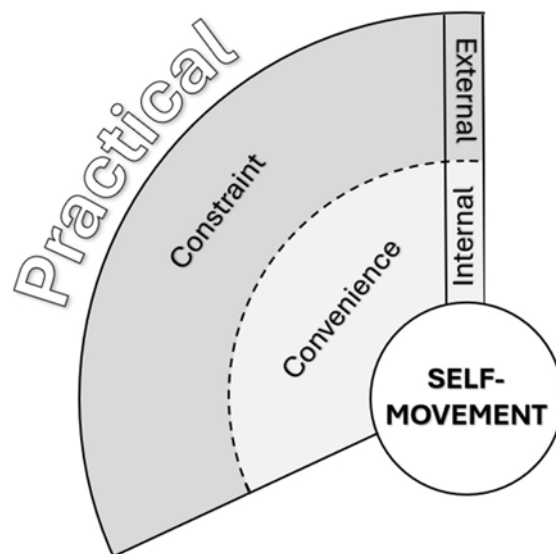
The two practical forces of *constraint* and *convenience* (Figure 7.2) are presented in the following two subsections. These are thematically linked as practical forces for the way that they draw attention to variables that channel people's movements within the realms of practicality.

The term *constraint* – originating from the Latin *constringere*, meaning to *tie* or *compress* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024a) – is used to refer to the degree of restriction that limits or

directs an employee's "choice" to work for a given organisation. While it manifests differently for people, ultimately the pressure of wage dependency can be seen to *constrain* their freedom to choose the work that they do and the organisation within which they perform that work.

Convenience – deriving from the Latin *convenientia*, meaning *ease* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2025) – refers to the degree of ease that acts as a persuasive force in everyday life, influencing work-related choices as much as any other (Heidegger, 2001). The general tendency of people to move according to *(in)convenience* is recognised as a substantive factor that explains why people find themselves working for a given organisation.

Figure 7.2. The practical forces of constraint and convenience that influence self-movement



7.1.1. Constraint

The reason for beginning with constraining factors is because it is important to register when talking with people in work about their working lives that there is often an extent to which they do *not* have choice in the matter of being in their organisation. In academic searches for meaning and motivation in work, expressions of experienced constraints can easily be overlooked as throwaway remarks, such as those of interviewees **Alex**, **Ellis**, and **Val**:

Alex: ...at the moment it does the job for me... pays the bills.

Ellis: Of course, it pays the bills.

Val: ...obviously, everyone needs to find an income, don't they? So, you need to survive.

Yet, such simple statements speak volumes about people's starting circumstances to be a working member of an organisation at all. Some people may have total freedom to choose whether to work, but these would most likely be in a privileged minority of a workforce – there, in part, at their leisure. Accordingly, any theory seeking to explain the reasons among folk to be part of an organisation should include an awareness of the forces that constrain self-movement through life and work. **Val**, for instance, recalled a past period where they may very well have moved away from their organisation (nowadays a subsidiary brand of Solet, but not at the time), had they have not needed to stay to pay their bills:

Val: *There was a stage with my previous bosses where I had a horrible time with them, and I didn't like them, but... I needed the money. So, I kept coming and they left. And here I am, still here... There were points in which I thought I can't put up with them any longer, but I needed the money. There's no way I could afford to give it up... I just had to keep myself going through it, because they weren't nice at all.*

Val was not the only interviewee that included a need for income as one of their reasons for being with Solet. Interviewees **Charlie**, **Casey**, and **Jude** expressed similar experiences of wage dependency forcing them to work somewhere. However, rather than financial pressures compelling them to stay in their current employment despite relational difficulties within the organisation, constraints directed them to Solet in respective moments of change:

Charlie: *We all need to go to work to pay the bills... At the time I got the job, I didn't know much about [Solet]. And it was a job. I needed a job... at the time it was a "needs-must".*

Casey: *So, then I had to go and find a new job. You know, I'm not rich. I do have to work... And what it came down to in the end was: there were two companies that could meet my financial demands. One was [Solet], and one was a consultancy company.*

Jude: *When I joined [Solet], I was hoping that in my head this would be me until retirement. So, I'm 50 years old and I'm thinking to myself, I would like to do another*

10 years ideally– Not that I'd like to do it, financially I would have to do another 10 years.

By their own accounts, neither **Charlie** nor **Casey** nor **Jude** could sensibly opt for unemployment. They, like many, were constrained by their need to make money. Of course, **Casey** describes binary options available to them at the time. But this choice was nevertheless subsumed within a wider context: the imperative to work to fund life.

Certain external variables, there in the course of life, influence people's possible movements by literally limiting them to a finite set – large or small – of seemingly viable options at a given decisive moment. In other words, constraining factors curtail human agency. Life is not lived in the ideal realm of infinite potential; self-movement is not limitless.

Sometimes, such constraining factors can be seen as discrete and relatively transient, albeit with legacy effects. An example of this is the unanticipated COVID-19 pandemic that led interviewees **Sol** and **Avery** to return to full-time, salaried work after their respective self-employment situations became untenable. Interviewee **Jean** also experienced a discrete, sudden life-changing event that forced them to correct course and return to Solet. Excerpts from their respective accounts are shown below.

***Sol:** Well, obviously COVID played a big part in my role... I had to essentially close my business... people were cancelling left, right, and centre because of COVID.*

***Avery:** Obviously, COVID comes along, COVID changes everything, and all the work stopped overnight. So... I then had to fill my time until work started to come back... So, they just said come and work for us full-time... I'd ideally love to go back... to doing freelance work... but I don't feel comfortable at the moment to do that.*

***Jean:** I lost my whole life. Had to come back home.... And then someone saw me in town, and was like, "what are you doing here?". And I was like, "erm, OK, yeah, this has happened". They were like, "you should ring up and see".*

In instances such as the above, self-movement is a response to external events that occur at least partially beyond one's control. Self-movement in this sense is part adaptative behaviour. Equally, constraints – and people's adaptations to them – can also be characteristically more enduring in their nature. A common example raised among interviewees was the long-term responsibility that comes with raising a family. This was the case for interviewees **Sol**, **Drew**, **Jude**, **Ellis**, **Morgan**, and **Jan**, who each made references to

how their family responsibilities, in one way or another, influenced their being at Solet. **Jan** is a particularly interesting example to draw upon to illustrate this, since the financial burden of their family seemed to be their *only* reason for them being there:

***Jan:** I guess I do what I do at the minute purely for [chuckles]– it's gonna sound so bad – purely for money, really... just pay the bills. Like if I didn't have bills to worry about at all, I'd probably go back to being a teacher... Loved the job. And then I just realised, if I keep this up, I will not be able to afford all my bills... I've gotta go find a job that pays... my, you know, family's bills and everything... Because, at the end of the day, everything costs money... healthcare, food, heat all costs money... You're doing it to look after yourself and, you know, those you are financially supporting.*

The *need* for work is a shared theme among great swathes of the working population. As shown through the series of excerpts in this subsection, external constraining factors within the course of people's lives can be seen to be somewhat idiosyncratic, yet at the same time, similar in the way that they force people to work somewhere whether they like it or not. Some workers are forced to stay in certain circumstances (e.g., **Jan** and **Val**) while others are forced to change because of them (e.g., **Sol** and **Avery**). In this way, constraints act as a significant influence upon employees as they make their way through their world of work.

Having established the effect of external constraints on employees, the next subsection turns to a second practical factor that helps explain why individuals make certain choices regarding where they work. Unlike constraint, which is an external force acting upon the self, the following theme of *convenience* is positioned as an intrinsic, internal factor. What this means to suggest is that self-movement according to convenience or 'ease' is a fundamental human tendency (Heidegger, 2001: 81).

7.1.2. Convenience

Convenience featured in the accounts of many of the interviewees while reflecting on why they found themselves at Solet. This is a particularly interesting theme in the way that many interviewees were surprisingly candid when stating this as one of their reasons. This suggests, at the very least, that these interviewees were confident in being truthful about their reasons for being in their organisation, not feeling pressured to give only socially desirable responses. Interviewee **Jordan**, for example, had fantastically positive things to say

about their job, their colleagues, their boss, the directorate, and their organisation overall. Yet, notably, they still gave convenience as the *first* reason for being there at Solet:

Jordan: *Well, initially... umm, I'll be honest. Initially it was because it was in [city of HQ], less of a commute, and I've done a role previously like that.*

Jordan, of course, went on to give other reasons for being at Solet still six years on. But convenience was nevertheless a contributing factor. For **Jordan**, convenience featured as a form of experiential ease in getting to and from work (the commute) and while engaging in work in their role. Interviewees **Drew** and **Francis** echoed **Jordan's** point regarding the persuasion of a convenient work location as an important factor:

Drew: *Because the opportunity was there to work fairly locally to home.*

Francis: *OK, it was a job [laughs]. So, the ad that came up when it did, I applied and got the job. Good location... not too far from home.*

Meanwhile, **Jean** and **Avery** shared **Jordan's** sense of convenience in terms of comfort and familiarity:

Avery: *So, I think I do what I do now because it was an easy option... It kind of suits me... It's relatively easy for me... I don't have to try too hard, but that doesn't mean I don't work hard, if that makes sense... it kind of works for me at the moment.*

Jean: *Why I'm still here? It's probably because I'm not looking hard enough, because I'm comfortable where I am.*

Convenience seems to operate as a sort of attracting and retaining force, a gravitation 'toward making things easy for oneself' (Heidegger, 2001: 81). In this way, convenience could be seen to increase adience by the way it generates attraction towards the easy entity (Murray, 1938). It would be fair to say that neither **Jean** nor **Avery** came across as completely bought-in employees of Solet. Each expressed a tenuousness about their ongoing tenure. But still they were there, and convenience seemed to be a substantive reason why.

Other colleagues alluded to the convenience (ease) of their work in a more holistic sense, referring to the way that it fit into the grander scheme of their wider lives:

Alex: *It's convenient. It works for my lifestyle... it does the job for me, keeps me satisfied, keeps me happy, not too much pressure, not too much stress.*

Val: *When I started work it was just because they offered me a part time job and it fitted in with my home life, and then... it just progressed.*

Jude: *The initial reason was the fact that it was a work-life balance. I feel [Solet] could have delivered that for me. They have absolutely delivered that for me... that's exactly what I was what was looking to achieve.*

Interestingly, **Jude** explicitly made use of the well-known term “work-life balance”. However, when considered from a lived experience perspective, the above quotes suggest more than the presence of a dichotomous relationship between work and life, as if they were mutually exclusive categories. Work is something that many people do *in* life, and, of those people, many have no choice but to do it. As such, work must fit into a person’s life with a suitable degree of convenience for it to be an uncontentious part of it. **Val’s** comment about their job, that “*it fitted in with my home life*”, is a statement that demonstrates this. It also resonates with the official word of Solet, as previously reported in Chapter 5: ‘*we realise that work is only one part of a full life*’ (Solet, 2022: 22). As such, there is ever a balance to be struck, but that is between all things in life. In the continuous flow of ‘average everydayness’ (Heidegger, 1962: 69), convenience describes the ease with which one life element fits within the ensemble. Among other things, all people prefer this ease and therefore move towards entities that supply it.

Jude, in fact, spoke in depth about the primary reason for moving on from their previous organisation and coming to Solet. Despite great effort from their former line-manager to make up for the difficulty that **Jude** was facing, it seemed that nothing could reconcile the sheer inconvenience of their commute. As they explain:

Jude: *I’m here because I was getting to the point I wasn’t happy. What was it that was making me unhappy? It was the travelling. It was the distance. It was the hours. Because not only was I doing the hours, I was doing the travelling hours as well. I was commuting to [city] every day, leaving at 7:00 in the morning, getting back 8:00, 9:00 at night...*

I loved the job... I had to ask myself, what is it that’s making me unhappy? Is it my boss? Nope. He wasn’t making me unhappy. He was giving me full reign... So, when I was there, I was fine. It was everything around about it...

He tried to make me happy by saying 'take Wednesday off'. Well, that was great. I was in the house. I was doing my bits. I was catching up, getting to the gym, seeing the kids and then boom, Tuesdays and Thursdays... no, that wasn't a nice experience... I never even mentioned money once ('cause I knew they would have given me more money), because that was not the issue... I still couldn't stay, because they weren't able to offer me what I needed, which was the work-life balance... I needed to be in on a Wednesday. I needed to be in. That was a requirement of the job.

Despite loving their job, getting on well with their boss, and the seemingly likely possibility of more money in the mix, still the inconvenience of the commute was enough to move **Jude** into alternative employment. In this case, inconvenience stimulated abience, causing **Jude** to separate themselves from their previous organisation, despite a strong reason to stay: “*I loved the job*”. This unfortunate experience contrasts drastically with interviewee **Robin's** experience of their convenient commuting situation and interviewee **Sol's** ability to attend to their busy homelife:

Robin: *For me, it's just been the luckiest thing that ever happened, because it's meant that I, you know, I have hybrid working where I go into a beautiful [regional] office... once a week, have a beautiful commute, and I do it completely on my terms on whichever day of the week I want to. My other offices... I get to pick and choose when I go there, and then I also go to [HQ] roughly once a month.*

Sol: *Now I'm like, I'll have to leave at half four every day, 'cause I've got to get back for after school club and then my sons have got swimming and, you know, this, this this. So, I have loads of other stuff going on.*

Working for a particular organisation appears to be related to the extent to which one feels that their professional commitments quite literally “convene” (come together) with other important elements of their world. For both **Sol** and **Robin** (who each attended their online interviews from home), the flexibility that Solet provides through hybrid (home/office) working patterns and relaxed start and finish times allows their organisational duties to fit amongst everything else that they must and want to do. While each interviewee's perspective reflects their unique circumstances, the convenience (ease) with which work fits into the assemblage of ongoing life is a practical factor that brings people to, and keeps them in, a particular organisation.

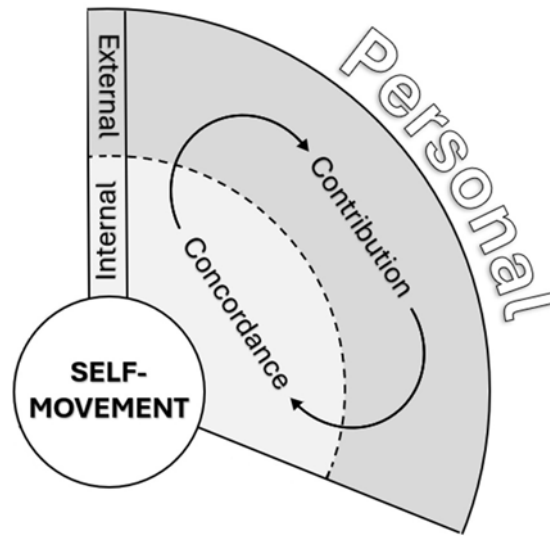
7.2. Personal forces: concordance and contribution

The next domain of influence on employees' movements relative to organisations comprises the personal forces of *concordance* and *contribution* (Figure 7.3). These are distinguished as personal forces for the way they pertain most closely to a person's idea of themselves and what they feel they should be dedicating themselves to in work. From the standpoint of employee experience, the following two sub-sections highlight the strong interconnection between these compelling forces.

The first of these, *concordance* – which derives from the Latin *concordāntia*, meaning *concord* (Entick, 1783; Oxford English Dictionary, 2024d) – represents the degree of harmony that an employee feels between their working circumstances and their personality, personal values, and aspiration for progression. When an employee feels a strong sense of self-concordance it appears that this can transform their reason to work into more of a *raison d'être*.

Intricately linked to an employee's sense of concordance seems to be their sense of their *contribution*. Relating to the Latin *contribuere*, which means to *add* or *give* to something (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024c), the term is used here to refer to an employee's notion of the value of their work for themselves and for others, where the latter (perceived value for others) can at times amplify the former (value for oneself).

Figure 7.3. The personal forces of concordance and contribution that influence self-movement



7.2.1. Concordance

Concordance was a recurring theme in interviewees’ reflections on why they work for their organisation. Considering that work entails the dispensing of one’s being in time that one cannot regain, in this regard it becomes a non-refundable expense of life on professional tasks for personal ends. Such tasks could occupy a mere moment or accumulate to fill an entire career. Logically, it follows that anyone would more readily dedicate their current time and being to a form of work that concords with – befits harmoniously – their person, their self.

The following three subsections detail how concordance seems to emerge in instances whereby employees experience affinity between their working reality and their personality, values, and ambition. A final subsection adds to this the role of timeliness in the occurrence of concordance, which addresses the inherent element of indeterminacy within this phenomenon (Hahn and Knight, 2021a).

7.2.1.1. Concordance with personality

From an abstracted research perspective, in the interviews, when asked the questions “*why do you do what you do?*” and “*why (then) do you work for Solet?*”, the part of each interviewee’s self that spoke (and thereby provided the recorded lexical data for analysis) was the reflective self. This part of each interviewee performed a self-examination of

accumulating (i.e., accumulated and ongoing) experience. This meant that responses involved a personal view of a lived past seamlessly enmeshed with a continuity of being in the present, along with a notion of potential being in the future.

Beneath the idiosyncrasy of responses that this generated, there is to be found an intriguing uniformity across some of the reasons that employees of Solet gave for being there. Responses were infused with a personal poignance that cannot be extrapolated beyond the individual themselves – “each to their own”, as the saying goes. But collectively they speak of the importance of there being alignment between oneself and one’s work, which a given organisation may or may not facilitate. This essence of agreeability with personality can be seen in the accounts of the following interviewees:

Quinn: *[chuckles] I think I just, sort of, fell into it and I haven't fell out of it... And yeah, I think it suits my personality being in finance. I like things in a certain order and, in terms of [Solet] specifically, it's the environment I like to work in.... But yeah, I just really like finance, and I like things having order and rules, and yeah [laughs]... that's the only way I can describe it... And I enjoy it. So, I'm just gonna keep going.*

Jordan: *I knew [Solet] was growing... and following an interview with [CEO] in terms of what his plans were, and where we were in the investment cycle and where he wanted to be in the next investment cycle... I knew it was gonna be busy, hectic. And I like that environment where it is busy, hectic... picking things up, putting it in your trolley.*

Sol: *Oh, because I enjoy it, and I enjoy the structure and being able to be creative and write things that I'm interested in.*

Max: *My kind of journey through life has been... quite motivated by what I'm doing for work sort of being like a creative outlet, I guess.*

For **Quinn**, concordance can be found in a personal affinity with the orderly nature of finance. For **Jordan**, it seems to be the antithesis of this: a fast-paced and frenetic workplace. Yet, for each of them, by their own accounts, the same organisation provides them the *right* environment to satisfy these differing preferences. Meanwhile, for **Sol** and **Max**, concordance seems to be found in roles that suit their creative side. For each of these four members of the same organisation, their various personal preferences appear to be important determinants of their continuing presence there.

It follows from this that if an organisation cares to gain and retain the investment of its chosen people, then it must become and remain that which suits their uniqueness. Hypothetically, in an alternative frame, any one of the above-quoted employees could have found their respective experiences within the organisation to be at odds with what makes them tick. For example, **Sol** or **Max** could have found their creative expression being stifled. Perhaps also the pace and (un)predictability of **Quinn's** and **Jordan's** roles could be vastly different from what they self-statedly prefer, perhaps too hectic for **Quinn** or too orderly for **Jordan**. In such scenarios, it would be reasonable to assume that any of these employees would be less content with their circumstances, and thus more inclined to seek work elsewhere more agreeable to their personal preferences.

7.2.1.2. Concordance with personal values

The inherent focus upon personality and individuality within the interviews naturally elicited comments pertaining to the concordance between the lived experience of work and personal values. The impact of a sense of concordance (or discordance) between individuals' experiences of their working circumstances and the values that they hold dear can be succinctly illustrated by the clear contrast in the reflections of two interviewees in particular, **Jan** and **Ellis**:

***Jan:** It probably all comes back to value... I don't feel like I am being of value to the values that I would like to have, if that makes sense... you know, actually helping people. My day job is basically just 'click buttons to make someone else money', and... bringing it back to that value, I don't feel of value... to what I would class as, you know, myself.*

***Ellis:** I feel that I'm able to help people... and get the best out of them. So, I think that's genuinely the reason I do what I do... and I think probably the key question is more why I've stayed with [Solet], because I think if a company is not right for me, then I would probably just leave quite quickly... And I think it's because there's a bit of an alignment of the company values to my personal values... I feel like I can be myself.*

Evidently, the excerpted employment experiences of **Jan** and **Ellis** are at differing ends of a spectrum. Both expressed a core interest in helping people. Yet, only **Ellis** felt that they were doing this through their work. For **Ellis**, this seemed to build a sense of affinity with the organisation as they were able to realise their desire to be *of value* to others via their role.

Meanwhile, **Jan** appeared to be gaining little to no sense that they were helping people while they merely *“click buttons to make someone else money”*.

Stepping momentarily beyond the interview data, the extent to which working concordantly with personal values may influence people’s movements towards or away from a given organisation can be illustrated with **Jan** and **Ellis**’ respective responses to the organisational commitment section of the questionnaire. Although this is by no means a statistical comparison, **Jan** could not have been less committed to Solet, selecting 1 out of 5 on a scale of *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* for all three items pertaining to their intention to spend the rest of their career with the organisation, emotional attachment to it, and sense of belonging there. Conversely, **Ellis** answered 4 out of 5 for all responses. These respective responses suggest that experiencing concordance at a core value level can emotionally draw individuals towards a given organisation, while discordance can push them away. This suggestion is corroborated by another interviewee, **Jude**, who answered 5 out of 5 for all organisational commitment questions:

***Jude:** I've always been a very honest person... and that's the one thing that I feel with [Solet]. It's a very honest business and that's why I feel we're a good match.*

Akin to the way that **Ellis** felt that Solet shared their core value of helping people, **Jude** saw in their organisation a value that they hold dear to themselves, namely honesty. Whether **Jude** is objectively an honest person, or whether Solet is objectively an honest organisation is beside the point; the variable influencing **Jude’s** orientation towards Solet seems to be their perception of it, as a business, possessing this admirable characteristic (Chun, 2017; Ashforth et al., 2020).

The antithesis can be seen in comments made by interviewee **Jean**, regarding another admirable characteristic: respectfulness. At the time of interview, **Jean** felt strongly that they were not receiving sufficient respect from their colleagues, as shown in the below excerpt:

***Jean:** It's like the respect is not there anymore and I think it's just that... common courtesy, respect... Like, regardless of who you are, you should come into the workplace and be respected. And that doesn't always necessarily mean that someone's gonna be super nice to you. But it's the 'pleases', the 'thank yous'... I feel like the least respected person on the team... That's infuriating to me because there is*

one thing that I would give... I could absolutely hate you as a person, but... I'd just respect you... It's a baseline. It is the bare minimum that I should get paid for.

The above excerpt suggests that **Jean**, unlike **Jude**, was experiencing a discordance with regards to a value that they find fundamental in their professional life. Once again, there is no measure here of whether **Jean** is, in fact, themselves objectively respectful and being disrespected; what influences them is the *impression* that this behaviour that they believe to be vital is not being exhibited by their colleagues. This seems to drive a desire to distance themselves from the organisation. **Jean's** words to this effect were, "*I'm gonna be honest with you... if I got paid the same to move somewhere else... I would leave now... it's not that same environment as it once was*". In the previous chapter, "respectful" did not feature as one of the relational characteristics in the model, but it is likely that, akin to honesty, an overarching sense of it in the organisation is an impactful determinant of employees' overall orientation towards the organisation.

7.2.1.3. Concordance with personal ambition

A further important dimension of concordance that can be drawn from the collection of interviewees' reflections is that which relates to people's self-actualising tendency (Rogers, 1980) or desire to experience the realisation of personal potential. Many of the employees cited their own professional development as a key reason for being at Solet. This aligns with the theme of concordance, as it reflects the meeting of an innate ambition to advance or progress in their professional lives.

The experience of advancement or progression connotes a sense of positive movement towards a desirable end (even if that end is a means to a further end). Moreover, where personal ambition is realised (or at least seems realisable) in the organisation, this appears to provide a strong stimulus to invest more of oneself into the organisation. Conversely, when such opportunities are desired but seem non-existent or unattainable, it is clear to see how employees begin disengaging and seeking opportunities elsewhere. The following contemplation of **Morgan** is an interesting illustration of this in retrospect of many years of being in the organisation:

Morgan: *I question sometimes, it does come up in my mind, especially when I've been here a long time, there's not that many people left anymore from when I started, so every now and then when... a long-timer leaves, I sort of question to myself, am I a bit stale sitting here? Should I? People don't stay in long-term careers anymore. People move around a lot, much more than used to be done... am I not doing myself and my career any justice by sitting? And so, I do sort of wonder about that.*

And then I think, well, no, because I haven't just sat still with [Solet]. I have progressed through... and I totally have grown with [Solet]. I've been here a long time. I'm a different person from when I started the business; this is a different business from when it started. Then I sort of come back to, 'well, actually, no, it's not like I'm still sitting at the same desk in the same job', you know, as many, many years ago. And also I couldn't be, because the business is actually a different business and... that job that I started with isn't even really the same job anymore... times have changed.

And so, yes... I do sort of question that, you know, should I move on? And then I think, well, then I come back to, you know, 'the grass is always greener on the other side'. And what if I moved on? What would I be moving on for? Am I happy with everything that I've got here? Is there anything that I'm unhappy with? Not really, it all works...

I'm very lucky in the situation that I'm in and where I've progressed to and probably within the means of what I actually want. Not everybody wants to be the CEO. Not everybody wants to... climb and climb and climb and climb. But I think for what I've seen of some other friends who've gone, they just feel like they've run their time, and they can actually move their career on elsewhere.

In **Morgan's** musings there is a great deal of implied references to concordance as a form of agreeability with where they want to be or go in their career. Periodically, it seems **Morgan** has reflected upon whether Solet is the *right* organisation for them in terms of their current circumstance and career trajectory. Yet, despite the movements of (former) colleagues, they have chosen to stay working for Solet because Solet works for them. A key reason for not moving on elsewhere seems to be that they have experienced the right amount of positive progression for them over the years. Much of the terminology that **Morgan** uses, in fact, rather directly implies the idea of movement. Key examples include:

- *"Not everybody wants to kind of climb and climb and climb and climb"*
- *"Should I move on?"*
- *"Am I a bit stale sitting here?"*
- *"People move around a lot"*

- *“I haven’t just sat still with [Solet], I’ve progressed through... and I totally have grown with [Solet]”*

Within the personal context that **Morgan** gives, these motion-related ideas of *climbing*, *moving on or around* versus *sitting still* and *going stale*, along with a feeling of *progressing through* and *growing with* the organisation suggest that their long-term experience of working at Solet has been highly agreeable to them. These reflections indicate that concordance between a person and an organisation is a continuous, cumulative experience that can encourage said person to keep with their company. The interview with **Morgan** captured this directly in a single packet of reflection at a given point in time. But their summary of the degree of agreeability between their continued presence in the organisation and their career trajectory to date represents an accumulation of weeks, months, and years of daily experience culminating in an overall positive orientation towards the source: Solet.

Two further employees, **Elliot** and **Robin**, who came across as highly motivated contributors to the organisation, used similar movement-related phrasing that portrays personally fulfilling experiences. Whereas **Morgan**, above, framed their reflections in retrospect, **Elliot** and **Robin** refer to the movements of *expansion* and *pushing*, respectively, in a present and ongoing sense:

Elliot: *I do what I do because it is my passion. It is rewarding and no day is the same. I always do something different. In past jobs, it's just been nine to five. You do the same thing every day. I feel like I'm able to learn and expand as a person in a really rewarding role. So... that's basically essentially why I do what I do.*

Robin: *I've got this kind of bigger exposure to actually, when I want to push in my career or learn something, I've got that open book to do so. So, for me, I just think... I've worked hard to get this position, but I've struck gold in terms of what I've managed to make it into... I think it gives me an outlet for like working really hard.*

Akin to their colleague **Morgan**, both **Elliot** and **Robin** found that Solet offered them the opportunity to progress unimpeded. **Elliot** previously felt in past jobs a sense of daily repetition. This implies that they found themselves at that time not where they wanted to be, nor likely to get wherever that idealised position was by staying there. By contrast, their working experience at the time of interview appeared to be in concordance with their inherent desire to pursue their passion and potential. **Robin** echoed this sense that Solet facilitated their ambition to advance their career towards their own desired horizon.

The inverse of this positive sense of concordance can be observed by returning to **Jean**. Contrary to their colleagues, they expressed a sense of motionless or, in their words, “stagnation” while elaborating upon what was leading to their dissatisfaction at Solet:

Jean: *The fact that there is a clear lack of progression, and I work in a team... for people who are in development...*

I actually really like my job, but everything else is like stagnant... the weight of the stagnation is getting heavier than the job satisfaction that I actually have doing my actual job... I fought like a couple years ago to get a [course] done. And I really wanted it... I spoke to my whole team about it and we almost like petitioned my manager for it and they said “yes”. And then about six months later, it got taken off the table because we got a new HR director. That infuriated me... I’m a trainer and I’ve had five days training in five years.

Like their colleagues, **Jean** also seemed keen to progress in their career. Yet the lack of opportunity for this seemed to tarnish their impression of their organisation. There is a subtle irony to a trainer with a lack of training, and it appears to run counter to **Jean’s** will to advance. At the time of interview, **Jean** was contemplating leaving the organisation, in part due to this sense of stasis that did not sit well with them. Another of the interviewees, **Chris**, was formerly in a similar position to **Jean**, and it was the relief of being able to move themselves in a desired direction that they felt led them to stay with the organisation. Again, direct references to movements with positive connotations feature frequently in their expressions:

Chris: *If I don’t feel like I’m going anywhere or achieving anything, that really gets to me... With one of my previous roles, I nearly left the company because there was no sort of step up for me and the work I was doing wasn’t challenging anymore. Once a manager gets into that role, they sort of tend to stay there for years, which is great, but in terms of like the business. But when you’re sat under them, you feel like you can’t go up. You can only go sideways. My current role opened up, so now I feel like I’m finally sort of developing in my career... I don’t feel like I’m stuck anymore.*

Throughout **Chris’** recollection of this experience there are various references to their ambition to travel in a desired metaphorical direction (especially upwards and out from under). Terms referring to not “going anywhere”, there being no “step up”, “stay[ing] there for years”, being “sat under”, being unable to “go up”, until something “opened up” all allude to a frustration with not being able to move when one feels ready to do so. Not living in

concordance with one's sense of potential, readiness, and deservedness to advance appears to lead to disengagement and withdrawal from the organisation. As evidenced by the interviewees' accounts, people remove themselves from organisations in which they see no worthwhile future. Conversely, the facilitation of self-movement at a desired pace towards personal goals seems to encourage individuals to remain with their organisation.

The common turn of phrase, "onwards and upwards", comes to mind in instances such as these. As a figurative reference to movement, it implies that betterment is found "above and beyond" someone's current position, rather than in what is "beneath them" or found in instances of stasis, stagnation, or setback. From **Chris'** first-person perspective, when Solet seemed unable to enable them to realise their career development ambition, the organisation became an unacceptable place for them to remain. Thereafter however, since Solet gave **Chris** the ability to live according to their ambition, this negative impression reversed, thereby inducing them to continue moving onwards and upwards, as it were, within the organisation. These findings suggest that when organisational members wish to advance their careers, a determining factor in manifesting employee adience (rather than abience) is the extent to which their organisation facilitates (rather than frustrates) the realisation of this core ambition.

7.2.1.4. Concordance through timeliness

After having highlighted several ways that concordance can manifest and influence people's movements towards or away from an organisation, it is important to establish here also the dynamism of concordance over time. So far, concordance has been discussed in relation to personality, personal values, and personal ambition, all of which appear rather consistent, enduring notions. Individuality has been demonstrated, which suggests that organisations must be dynamic in the sense that they must be many things to many people simultaneously in order to gain their personal investment (Smith and Lewis, 2011). But the enduring nature of these sub-themes of concordance as so far elaborated largely portray an image of within-person consistency. Personalities, personal values, and the tendency to want to realise one's own potential are perhaps rather stable human characteristics. Yet, people and their various perspectives vary through time. The landscape tends to change along journeys of human experience.

To illustrate how concordance can change through time, it helps to return to **Morgan's** suggestion that perhaps "*not everybody wants to... climb and climb...*". In one sense, "*everybody*" could be taken to mean *different* people at the *same* point in time. But it is also important to consider how the *same* person may change over time. The same person may want to "*climb*" in a given period of their working life but not in another. Examples of such people vying for advancement at the time of interview were **Elliot** and **Ellis**:

Elliot: *I've been here for a year and half, and I've learnt so much... I feel ready to kind of move on and progress and get more opportunities.*

Ellis: *I feel like I could offer more... Over the next couple of years, I'd really wanna try and, yeah, unlock a bit more... I'd like that extra challenge, and I think that would come from, you know, progression.*

But at the same time, there were also examples of equally enthused employees who were not considering career advancement at the time of interview. Some of these, of course, simply did not mention career advancement at all when thinking freely in response to the questions. However, to illustrate the point of concordance between the offering of an organisation and a person's desire to find what suits them at a particular point along their career journey, it is possible to draw on comments made by **Stevie**, **Drew**, and **Jude**:

Stevie: *Having spent many years being number one in finance, I have taken it upon myself to actually take a break from that and to actually come and do the part of job that I enjoy, which is basically the systems processes and introducing change into the finance function. So, I guess... enjoyment and areas of real interest is where I'm coming from. Because, although I'm an accountant, prior to switching to accountancy, pretty much a good deal of my education and degree were based on computers and programming.*

Drew: *I was a Finance Director until March this year, and I joined [Solet] on a short-term contract to have some fun in my last 18 months before retirement.*

Jude: *I didn't want to progress... I joined the business because I wanted a new challenge. I was in an extremely high position within hospitality, and probably felt a little bit jaded after COVID because it was such a hard time for us all... I didn't want progression. I was like, "nope, seen it, done it"... I've been on the board. I've done board papers. I've done board reporting. Do not want that level again. And now in the last six months I'm thinking to myself, "ooo, if opportunities came up, absolutely I would consider it".*

The key point here is in essence happenstance: a timely meeting of person and organisation. An organisation that offers a person just what they are after at a given stage in their life is a highly attractive proposition, so it seems. **Stevie**, **Drew**, and **Jude** all found their way to directorial roles at certain points in their careers, yet each also left those for respective reasons and found Solet to be a more agreeable place to work. Each of them was travelling along an individual life timeline, yet along these timelines something brought them into Solet.

Stevie returned to what they once enjoyed, **Drew** wanted fun before retirement, and **Jude** wanted a new challenge. Every colleague's reason is bound to be different inasmuch as every reason is bound to oneself. Across cases, however, there is the essence of a search and discovery. One searches for that which matches their current sense of what is right for themselves.

From an egological viewpoint, this trio of colleagues each saw in Solet, at the time they felt the need for change, the potential to be happier *there in that organisation* rather than *here in this one*, wherever that was. The pursuit of happiness is the part that human agency plays in the eventual person-organisation happy encounter. But part of the discovery is ever governed by happenstance – concordance possible by coincidence first. Chance, luck, fate, and serendipity are other terms one could use. But a person being fortunate enough to discover a role in an organisation that suits them has as much to do with the timeliness of the encounter as it does their will to be happier.

An excerpt from **Jordan** illustrates how this interaction between human will and happenstance can produce a happy encounter for an employee and employer. **Jordan's** reason for even looking into Solet before stepping into it six years prior was due to having spent too long somewhere where they did not want to work anymore:

***Jordan:** I have been in other roles where I haven't been happy. And you keep going and you keep going, but then you reach a point, right? You naturally reach a point where you go, "I can't do this anymore. I've tried and tried and tried". And I think you just have to accept that it's not going to happen.*

But whether that's you or them or the company, you have to make that decision. Do you just leave (which is what I've previously done) and accept that it's just not working? And I think that's a big thing to accept as well, because I wasn't giving up. I

tried for months and months and months, so it just didn't happen... I have experienced it elsewhere, whereas here I have not experienced anything like that yet.

It was abundantly clear in the research interview that **Jordan** loved being at Solet. Some of their words to this effect were, “[CEO] is just lovely”, “I love coming into the office”, “I still love what I do”, “that’s... one of the many things I love about [Solet]”. For so much of their working experience being so loveable, they stayed there. Yet nevertheless, timeliness (happenstance) was a determining factor in this being possible in the first instance. Had **Jordan** not been unhappy at that exact time, had they quit their role earlier or later, then the employee-organisation (**Jordan**-Solet) encounter might never have occurred for this mutually beneficial professional relationship to flourish for years.

Concordance for employees ultimately involves a harmony with all things influencing professional experience. One’s job needs to suit one’s personal preferences (personality) and personal values. It also needs to provide progression to the extent that it is sought. And there is always the element of chance at play, as both people and organisations undergo change (Smith and Lewis, 2011). All these forces impel people to keep on with or move on from current working circumstances.

The following subsection turns to an important theme that appears closely related to the experience of *concordance*, that of one’s personal *contribution*. These themes appear related in the way that an employee’s work contribution is an extension of themselves into the organisation, which needs to feel worth their while.

7.2.2. Contribution

From the accounts of the interviewees detailing why they worked for Solet, an influential factor in their decision-making seemed to be the perceived impact or relevance of their contribution to the organisation. Some interviewees expressed this as a desire to make a valued contribution to Solet’s functionality through their involvement in its various systems and processes. Others focused on their contribution to the people upon whom the functionality of the organisation depends, be they internal or external stakeholders. These emphases of *functional* contribution and *social* contribution were sometimes expressed in isolation, but often expressions included a nuanced combination of the two.

An example of an innate desire to be of value through one's work in this combined (functional and social) sense is well-depicted within a series of reasons that **Casey** provided for why they do what they do not just in general, but also specifically for Solet. **Casey's** reasons that relate to a desire to provide a valued contribution are balanced by already discussed constraining forces (i.e., the need to make money) and the timeliness of Solet opening a befitting role at an opportune moment. But, nevertheless, a will to offer a personal contribution to a worthy organisational cause comes through in their comments:

***Casey:** [I] needed to do something that still had some level of worth, of sort of societal benefit that wasn't just the vicious capitalistic "grab all the money that you can"... So, I do what I do because I do earn a decent living at it, I'm good at what I do, but it does actually have some wider value... and that just all sort of fits with how I try and make things better overall... I'm not gonna pretend that I'm a nurse. It's not where I am... But I do sit there every day and consider consumer harms and how to prevent them, and how to protect people's rights while operating within a private business.*

Casey was balanced in their assessment of their contribution. On a self-set scale of societal value, they did not see their profession on par with the likes of nursing. But they did see it as a valuable and worthwhile use of their time, effort, and expertise not just for their own (financial) well-being, nor that of the organisation, but for the welfare of people in general. A further excerpt from **Casey** suggests that the perception of one's contribution being more valuable in one organisation than another can significantly influence decisions regarding where to work, even when the appeal of more money factors in the equation:

***Casey:** The consultancy company was actually offering a bit more money and I sat down and went, "right, OK, do I wanna do consultancy or do I wanna be in-house?" In-house is more developmental so you can... build something more lasting. You can leave a bit of a mark on things... I can look at my old employer and see that most of what I put in place is still there... and [Solet] was pretty green fields. So, I was like OK, so there's the opportunity to build something to last... it is that opportunity to build something more lasting, to create something from scratch, that brought me in-house again, even though it would have been more money to go consultant.*

This appeal of being able to feel an impact through one's work was echoed by some of **Casey's** colleagues in the more *functional* sense of contributions to organisational operations. This conveyed the feeling of reward that people can gain from witnessing their

skills being put to good use. Comments from **Chris**, **Jude**, **Robin**, and **Francis** are most representative of this:

Chris: *I find it interesting and rewarding. The work that I do directly contributes to the bookings that we get.*

Jude: *I feel I can add value... I feel as though I've got a very important job to ensure that we look after these key owners very well.*

Robin: *[Solet] is such a numbers-orientated business... when you are hitting the numbers, you get such a rush of purpose, and it feels like you're really contributing to something that's growing. And I like that... I thrive off it.*

Francis: *Yes, many issues that I would like to contribute towards the solution of... So, I got here and found I'm going to narrow that down. No processes in place and so many disjointed features and activities... I just wanted to get my hands in and try and work with the team to get to a good solution. So that's why I'm still here.*

Each of these interviewees had notably distinct roles to play in the organisation, but among them they had a shared objective to contribute to the organisation. At the time of interview, **Chris** was a strategist in marketing automation, while **Jude** was in client relations specifically managing the organisation's premium accounts; **Robin** was a regional marketing manager (many miles from HQ), and **Francis** a lead business analyst. Yet, the comments from these four colleagues who may not cross paths often or even at all are ever so similar: "*The work I do directly contributes*", "*I feel I can add value*", "*it feels like you're really contributing to something that growing*", "*I would like to contribute towards the solution*".

Collectively, these statements suggest that a person's sense that their work has a positive impact positively influences their personal orientation towards the organisation. Each employee recognised a sense of their importance to the success of their organisation. It follows that this value-oriented involvement can lead to a deeper, more willing investment of human resources into organisational endeavours. Antithetically, of course, it also implies that employees who feel that their contribution is not of any meaningful value are markedly less inclined to go "above and beyond" for the company's cause. Recalling **Jan's** hollow impression of their contribution demonstrates this well: "*My day job is basically just 'click buttons to make someone else money'... I don't really feel of value, you know, to... myself*".

It is through **Jan's** experience that the important link between a sense of self-concordance and a personal contribution to an organisation can be seen in an instantiated lack of it. It is possible to gather from their lacklustre experience a sense of what Terkel (1975: xiii) referred to as 'torpor' and 'a Monday through Friday sort of dying'. An impression that you are not contributing in a worthwhile way surely cannot be 'life-giving', but rather more likely 'life-depleting' (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003: 263). To contribute is to be meaningful in the organisation. This implies that helping employees to see the meaningfulness of their contribution is crucial for strengthening their connection with the organisation where withdrawal may otherwise ensue.

For many of the interviewees, it would be difficult to understate the impact that a positive sense of their *social* contribution has on their orientation towards the organisation. This can be exemplified most clearly through the reflections of **Jamie**, **Ellis**, and **Jean**, who all dominantly focused on their contribution to people within the performance of their roles:

Jamie: *So... I absolutely love what I do and my role that I do now, it makes a real difference... as I've got a bit older, I wanted a role that sort of had a bit more meaning to it in addition to sort of meeting sales targets... now I can make a real difference to things that matter to me, like the environment, sustainability, and sort of social inequalities... And I get the opportunity to sort of lead and steer the business to really make a difference like that. Always sounds cheesy when I talk about my job.*

Ellis: *So, I do what I do quite intentionally... I think it's because I enjoy helping people... to tease a horrible cliché, by getting the best out of people and making people the best they can be... So, I think that's genuinely the reason I do what I do... it's the helping people... it's doing the right thing with the people involved.*

Jean: *I like to think of myself as quite a people-focused human. I like people [laughs]. And my job actually gives me that satisfaction where I actually get to see people progress, and that's quite a nice feeling... I make people's lives a little bit easier while I'm here and then let them on the road... I like teaching people stuff... And there's two sides of that, isn't there? There's the satisfaction of, "oh, that person's been helped. It's great". But then there's also that ego bit of you, I think, that's like, "I did that [chuckles], I started that", and that's probably why I do what I do.*

As is clear for **Jamie**, **Ellis**, and **Jean** – amid the cheese and cliché – contributing to the well-being of others through work can be a strong motivator to be part of an organisation. It should be noted that each of these employees were in particularly socially oriented roles, which reinforces the importance of self-concordance. But it also suggests that being of value

not just to the organisation but to the people whom the organisation can affect is what many seek in their role. A company that can provide this opportunity thus becomes a more worthwhile place to be to fulfil that desire. **Jamie**, **Ellis**, and **Jean** are emblematic of how people can have a *functional* contribution to the organisation via their deeper desire to contribute *socially*.

Further interviewee comments pertaining to contribution suggest that the value of one's personal contribution does not exist in isolation. There also appeared to be an important, more allocentric layer of collaborative contribution. This sometimes came through in comments relating to teamwork and shared objectives. It also appeared in terms of one's part in something bigger than themselves. The former can be seen below in comments by **Max** and **Quinn**, while the latter is succinctly captured in the views of **Sacha** and **Charlie**:

Max: *Why I kind of, like am happy working for [Solet] and why I kind of enjoy working for [Solet] is because... it's such a collaborative place to work... I find it very easy to lose motivation around work... partly it's not being challenged, but it's more kind of not feeling motivated by the people around me and that I feel like I'm contributing to them. And I think that [Solet] is really good at providing that kind of feeling, because it's so collaborative, and because everything you do feels like you get some recognition for it, and you get some kind of feeling of providing value.*

Quinn: *We're very social I think as well... we all wanna work towards like improving the business... it's got a good sense of community.*

Sacha: *However cheesy it sounds I genuinely think that are the best in the business at what they do. Just in terms of reputation, systems, the care in the process, brand image, security, and also how they look after people, both owners and staff, I think that they genuinely care, even though they're quite a big organisation. You don't feel like you're a tiny cog. You genuinely feel like you're kind of an important part of the business... and I like that.*

Charlie: *I choose to work here because I actually enjoy working here... I like working here. I like what the company does, what it stands for... I enjoy being a part of the company and the culture and what we do, I guess.*

The above excerpts from these four interviewees all imply the importance of collaboration in organisational settings. To be in an organisation is inherently to contribute to something bigger than oneself in conjunction with other contributors. The hope, of course, is that more can be achieved together than alone. A sense of collaboration, it seems, can influence a sense of the importance of one's own contribution. **Max**, **Sacha**, and **Charlie** each appear to

experience a positive sense of self-worth not only through their own part in Solet's dealings, but also in how their part combines with the contributions of their colleagues to produce something more impressive. To analogise this, it can be a beautiful thing to sing or play an instrument alone, but it is potentially more so in symphony with others. This implies that a sense of communal contribution in the organisation (to which **Quinn's** quote alludes) can encourage people to give more of themselves to the shared endeavour.

These findings regarding individual and collective contribution suggest that people are naturally drawn towards organisations that facilitate their desire to realise their value to themselves and to others. This personal driver of self-movement relates closely to a sense of self-concordance since it is ultimately the individual who will decide whether their contribution feels worthwhile. However, the influence that collaboration appears to have upon an individual's impression of the value of their contribution suggests that there are also relational forces at play. The following section considers how a sense of *consideration* within the organisation leads to a form of relational *confidence* that can influence individuals to move closer to or further away from the organisation.

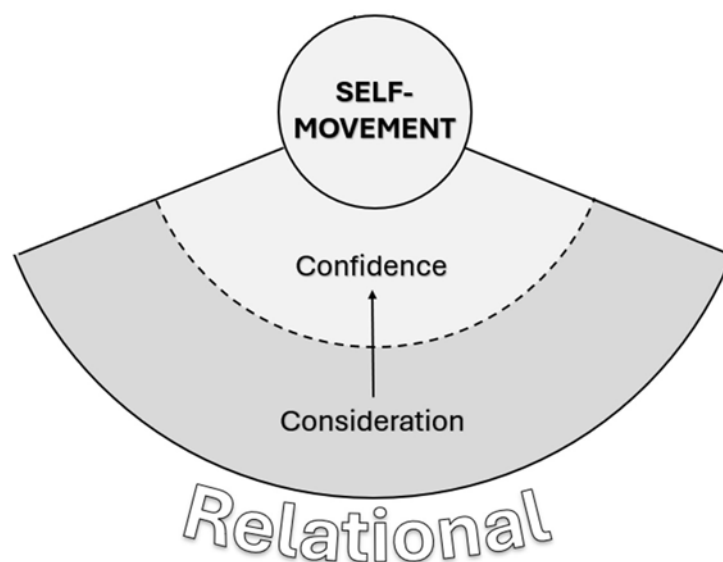
7.3. Relational forces: consideration and confidence

The final category of forces that influence people's movements with respect to organisations are the relational forces of *consideration* and *confidence*, whereby a sense of the former within the organisation seems to instil the latter in employees.

Consideration – a term that comes from the Latin *consīderāre*, meaning to *observe closely* and *contemplate* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024b) – is used here in an interpersonal sense to describe the extent to which someone feels that they are (or will be) thoughtfully regarded while working for the organisation. The future perspective is added in parenthesis above to illustrate how this impression can form even before someone becomes an employee of the organisation, based on what they understand about the employee experience there. It is for this reason that the term *confidence* – which stems from the Latin *confīdēre*, meaning to *confide* or *trust* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024e) – is used to describe the extent to which someone has faith in the people with whom, and thus company for which, they (may soon) work.

In Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.4, *consideration* is depicted in the external ring of the diagram to reflect the way it forms upon perceptions of the words and actions of others around oneself. Conversely, the *confidence* that subsequently develops through these interactions is situated in the internal ring. This placement reflects that, while confidence stems from external signals – such as being thoughtfully regarded – it takes root internally and, thereby, guides how someone views their presence and future within an organisation.

Figure 7.4. The relational forces of consideration and confidence that influence self-movement



To illustrate the potential causal relationship between these constructs, the following two subsections present them in tandem. By drawing on interviewee experiences from the pre-applicant stage and time thereafter within the organisation, the analysis first explores how an initial impression that employees are treated considerately in an organisation can encourage prospective employees to apply for a role there. It then explores how this sense of consideration in its raw form encourages current employees to stay and give more to the organisation.

7.3.1. How consideration instils confidence in prospective employees

By the accounts of the interviewees, a sense of received consideration in an organisation appears to be a powerful force that goes far beyond the individual employee that experiences it. People talk about their work-related experiences, positive and negative, and organisational reputations develop through these messages. The expression of positive employee experiences can have a favourable impact on the future state of the organisation by enhancing its appeal to higher-calibre candidates, who may have their pick of possible employers. Equally, articulated negative employee experiences can make an organisation seem one to be best avoided (unless constraints force one into it).

Chris' and **Jamie's** respective starting points for even contemplating coming to Solet exemplify how a sense of consideration experienced by current employees can persuade people to put in an application to work there themselves. For both **Chris** and **Jamie**, their initial experience of Solet was of its reputation as an employer:

***Chris:** So, at my old company, one of my colleagues left to go to [Solet] and they told me how amazing it is. And the company I was at, I didn't get treated very well as a staff member. So, when I heard about a company that cared about all of its staff, I thought, "fantastic, that's for me". So, then I moved into my first role. Absolutely loved the company. You can tell that they really care about every individual and they care about your personal development, which is why I've sort of had so many roles here. I've sort of climbed the ladder a little bit. And yeah, you can just tell that we really are a kind of family, as cheesy as it sounds, and I kind of hate saying that, but it's true [chuckles].*

***Jamie:** [Solet] just had that feeling about it. So, I've sort of known about [Solet] for a long time... I knew that they were doing good things. Heard that they've got a great culture (although that's always hard to define, what that culture actually is), so much so that when I was looking for a new job and I got offered two jobs on the same day, one was a maternity cover contract at [Solet], another was a permanent role with another business that were great as well, but I took the maternity cover contract because I really wanted to work at [Solet]. So yeah... I don't dread coming into work, everyone is really helpful... it's just a good place.*

For **Chris**, it was a former colleague with whom they stayed in touch that piqued their interest in Solet. At the time, they felt for whatever reason that they were not being treated well in their current organisation. The attraction of "a company that cared about all its staff",

coupled with the already-present repulsion of inconsiderate treatment in their current organisation, was enough to set them in motion towards Solet's doors.

For **Jamie**, it was the organisation's reputation that developed in the local area. Like **Chris**, **Jamie** had heard great things about Solet as a company to work for. At the time, this was enough to entice each of them to see what roles might be there for them. Over the years and months since these initial experiences (3 years, 9 months for **Chris**; 2 years, 3 months for **Jamie**), their accumulating first-hand experiences as employees have continued to portray the organisation as a considerate employer, thereby sustaining the original positive impression that drew them to it.

As demonstrated through these recounted experiences, an organisation's reputation can significantly affect its appeal to prospective employees. The positive "*feeling*" that **Jamie** garnered from the outside was enough to make them not only apply for a role at Solet but also turn down an apparently more secure role on offer at the time from another seemingly "*great*" company. This matters for organisations that want to attract best-in-class talent. Based on initial impressions of the company culture, Solet effectively beat a competitor in the labour market for years of **Jamie's** time, effort, and expertise.

From a performance-related perspective, this is highly beneficial for an organisation. By having a positive reputation among members of the community wherein it operates – and from where it is most likely to source talent – a company can attract a greater number of candidates through their confidence that it will be, as **Jamie** phrased it, "*a really great company to work for*". Had employees such as **Jamie** and **Chris** have heard that Solet was a terrible company to work for prior to entering the labour market, it is less likely that they would have applied at all, and certainly improbable that **Jamie** would have opted for Solet with an offer of a permanent contract from another great-seeming company on the table.

From the accounts of these two ambassadors of Solet, it is possible to infer how current employee experiences of a considerate organisation influence the potential calibre of the future workforce on an ongoing basis. As both **Chris** and **Jamie** heard about Solet as an employer directly and indirectly through other people, it can be reasonably assumed that they too share their positive (and negative) experiences with others around them. These people may themselves be the very employees that the organisation will hire in the future,

akin to how **Chris** came to be in the organisation; alternatively, they may simply be folk within the community who pass on positive messages through the grape vine for future “**Jamies**” to hear.

7.3.2. How consideration instils confidence in current employees

Once someone steps inside the organisation through the onboarding process, a sense of consideration (or lack thereof) becomes woven into an ongoing stream of experience of the organisation through interactions with various people (e.g., teammates and managers) and practices within it (Batat, 2022). While this sense begins forming from an employee’s first external impression of the organisation, it accumulates with every interaction thereafter on the “inside”. **Drew’s** account vividly illustrates how the accumulation of perceived considerate acts can feature in an enduring sense of confidence in the company:

***Drew:** I feel that they’re supportive at [Solet]. Because, obviously, working remotely you don’t see your colleagues all the time. However, I think they do plenty of work that makes you feel included... I’ve always felt that the people at [HQ] try their very best to sort of be inclusive. So, even though I was 180 miles from where they are, I am part of the team. And if you had a query or whatever, it was always to support, and I mean this year, for the first year ever, somebody has arranged my CPD for me! I’ve never had that...*

When I was working extra hours, it was like “oh, we don’t want you to do that”. It wasn’t like, “we expect you to do that just to fulfil your role”. “No, no, no, you must not work extra hours; how can we make this better for you?” So, I suppose that’s it. I think the ethos of trying to care for you as an employee – even though I’m detached from the main hub – still comes through, and that’s really nice.

Consideration can be felt through informal gestures such as discouraging overwork to more formal practices such as encouraging continual professional development (CPD). This simple ethos forms a foundation for confidence – a reason to invest more of oneself into the organisation. As **Drew** describes, it is through sincere support that a sense of care can permeate even geographically distant (remote) interactions where reassurance and trust can be more difficult to cultivate (Sani et al., 2023).

As the previous chapter demonstrated through the IPMA of POC variables, the two most impactful modelled variables upon employees’ combined commitment, engagement, and

satisfaction were their organisation overall seeming *supportive* and *trustworthy*. These two words powerfully convey employees' perceptions that they have the consideration of their colleagues, and the confidence that this instils in them that they are working for the right organisation.

Indeed, support featured heavily as a reason why the interviewees happily worked for Solet. Some expressed this explicitly. **Aiden**, for instance, felt that they "*had the most amazing support from day one, right through still even now*" from a "*brilliant*" team and "*on the whole... fab*" managers. And it was upon this basis that they simply concluded, "*that's why I work for [Solet]*".

Jude was equally clear about their sense of support and sureness that they wanted to work for Solet:

***Jude:** with [Solet], I want to work for them. I choose to work for them, because... I'm empowered in my job... I also feel like I have a support network there if I need it, and I feel I've got that at every level... it's a breath of fresh air... And that's what makes me think to myself, I want to stay here.*

Further to simply staying with the company, **Jude's** sense of support was so strong that it seemed to be a key driver in their confidence to invest more of themselves in the success of their organisation. Despite not entering the organisation with the ambition to do so (as shown in Section 7.2.1.4), their strong sense of support catalysed their confidence to take on more responsibility for the organisation through promotion:

***Jude:** Whether that would be right for me personally, I don't know, because it depends on the skillset required... But would it be there for me to do? Absolutely. And would I be supported? Absolutely, I think I would be. I would have no doubts about that... And I don't want you to think this is about me being overly confident of that. I just feel secure in the fact that I would have support with that... I might not get the position if I went for it... But I would feel comfortable enough and secure enough to go for it, definitely.*

It can be seen from this that a sense of consideration in professional life is a confidence-builder in terms of being in the organisation. It seems also that it comprises the other side of the coin with regards to feeling "of value". Whereas one's contribution to the organisation

infuses a sense of being of value to something (functional contribution) or someone (social contribution), feeling considered by colleagues is an affirmation that one is valued.

Just as *appreciation* in financial terms refers to an increase in value, feeling appreciated in a company is tantamount to experiencing a heightened sense of one's worth. This seems to act as positive motivator to remain in the organisation, an inducement to stay and give more. This can be evidenced by the accounts of **Avery** and **Ellis**, as shown below. While reading these comments, it is important to recall that **Ellis** was confident that they wanted to develop within the company "*over the next couple years*" (as shown in Section 7.2.1.4) while **Avery** was more on the fence about their future in Solet (as shown in Section 7.1.2). Yet, in both cases, feeling valued appears to offer a sort of reassurance (confidence) that continuing to contribute to the organisation is a worthwhile use of their time and energy:

Avery: *They seem to really respect the opinion I have, the views I give; I think they seem to respect the work that I do for them, and they seem to be grateful for the work that I do. And I think when you put that all together, it kind of makes you think well, they value you... I feel that in the comments that I get given... That actually makes you think, "well, they're not that bad", 'cause there are a lot of really s****y employers out there, and at least I'm not working for one of them.*

Ellis: *I've got some good colleagues... like peers that I've got there if I need support... And, you know, from a line-manager perspective... I've got people that I know respect and value me and trust me... So, I think the biggest thing is people, and don't underestimate how big that is. That's a really, really big chunk of it.*

It may seem a platitude to essentially argue that when employees feel valued in their organisation, they are more inclined to stay. But this simple point is perhaps too important to overlook, especially when evidence suggests that employers often do (De Smet et al., 2021). As **Ellis** stresses – and as **Avery's** account corroborates – the relational experience of being in an organisation, and therefore being in the "company" of others, is an influential factor in an employee's decision to continue contributing to it. In sum, the sense of value gained through gestures conveying interpersonal consideration seems integral to an employee's confidence to invest themselves in the company's success for some time to come.

7.4. Chapter summary

By openly exploring the rationales of a cohort of colleagues regarding what brought them to Solet and has since kept them working there, the qualitative analysis presented in this chapter has drawn from their various experiences a nuanced array of factors that appear to significantly influence employees' decisions to work for a given organisation. It began by addressing the practical constraints that can restrict a person's "choice" to be an employee, forcing them to work somewhere, in a way binding them to an organisation. It then addressed the element of convenience that makes the decision to work somewhere an easier one to make, showing also how inconvenience in sufficient measure can override even the most well-meaning managers' attempts to retain their team members.

The salience of concordance between the work a person does and their personality, values, and aspirations was subsequently shown to be a powerful force that draws individuals to a source that can sustain this harmonious feeling. In contrast, the living experience of work devoid of this feeling was shown to be dispiriting to the point that employees would readily avoid working somewhere were they not constrained to do so.

Thereafter, the analysis suggested that concordance is intricately linked to an employee's feeling that they add value functionally and/or socially through their contribution. In other words, some degree of self-worth appears to be experienced through the externalisation of one's value into the world. And while experiencing affinity between oneself and one's work was shown to be a matter of personal perspective, it was also seen to be influenced by fortuitous encounters – where prospecting employees and organisations simply find each other at the right time.

As has been maintained throughout this thesis, managers may not be able to control these practical and personal variables. Nevertheless, appreciating their effect on employees' will and ability to dedicate themselves to the organisational endeavour is an important starting point. This would allow managers to gain a deeper understanding of their colleagues' lives (Addams, 1902) and to consider the human factors and forces that underpin their self-investment in the organisation (Williams, 1920).

With this nuanced understanding of the core practical and personal reasons employees come to work, managers may be better equipped to instil in them the confidence that their

organisation is one worth dedicating themselves to. Therefore, to explore how management might achieve this in practice, the following chapter turns to the analysis of the hypothetical questions posed to the interviewees. Designed as a form of thought experiment, these questions sought to elicit that which is essential from management when working through the paradoxical task of ensuring both optimal employee happiness and productivity.

Chapter 8. Results 4 – Working through the performance management paradox: an internal consultancy thought experiment

Throughout the empirical phase of this investigation, doubt has emerged regarding whether management can truly “transcend” the deleterious effects of the performance management paradox (Lewis, 2000). Chapter 5 demonstrated that organisations cannot always satisfy their employees’ expectations. Despite acknowledging the importance of the employee experience for organisational performance, Solet’s directors openly accepted the latent conflict between their stakeholders’ interdependent yet contradictory demands. Additionally, employee complaints highlighted how the subjective experience of the company’s performance imperative may not always be conducive to it. Chapter 6 reinforced this, showing a statistically significant positive relationship between perceived HPMA and HAW, suggesting that negative perceptions of management reduce personal investment in the organisation. Chapter 7 then further complicated this reality by illustrating that there are variables beyond managers’ control within the employee experience.

Despite this doubt, some hope can be drawn from the findings. They indicate that the employee experience influences performance, and that management is an influential part of that experience. And while managers may lack absolute control, they are certainly not inconsequential. Their actions have interpersonal impact, albeit their positive potential depends on how employees perceive them.

Recognising, therefore, this ‘enlightening potential’ (Lewis, 2000: 763) of the employee experience perspective to inform management practice, the second part of the interviews was designed to provide an empirical foundation for a thought experiment. In this part of the interviews, employees were treated as “internal consultants” and asked to share their views on what promotes and prevents optimal worker productivity and happiness. These views informed the inquiry into what would be essential from management to attain and sustain the utopian scenario of *optimal conditions for both the people and performance of their organisation, wherein all employees are perfectly satisfied with their job, fully engaged*

with their work, wholeheartedly committed to their organisation, and thus given to performance.

The key themes drawn from this thought experimental process are presented in the following six subsections along with representative excerpted interviewee perspectives that support them. Each of the themes pertains to a managerial action essential in the ‘process of working through’ the performance management paradox (Lewis and Smith, 2014: 139). Collectively, they comprise a proposed framework to optimise the employee experience while ‘coping with enduring tensions’ (Lewis and Smith, 2014: 130).

In a similar approach to Peters and Waterman (1982: 9), who used ‘memory hooks’ by way of alliterative wordplay to make the McKinsey 7-S Success Framework more memorable for management, the key themes in this investigation were formed into the *aide-mémoire* “ACTION” (Figure 8.1). The essential actions within this acronym are to *appreciate, care, talk, involve, orient, and nurture*, each of which are addressed in turn below.

Figure 8.1. The ACTION framework



8.1. Thought-experimental findings: essential managerial actions

8.1.1. Action 1: Appreciate

In line with the paradox perspective of accepting tensions, any intentional ability to influence organisational outcomes for the better is underpinned by a foundational *appreciation* of the situation-at-hand and of the people within it who are affected by it (and

who also affect it). This begins with an understanding of the “reality” of the situation that working organisational members find themselves in, which interviewees **Robin** and **Charlie** each note in their own way:

Robin: *I completely appreciate and understand that, ultimately, we have to prioritise by what's gonna make the business money.*

Charlie: *I suppose there's always a list of things that need doing and you're prioritising, and you know... they're constantly assigning jobs which will bring you in more income, if you like.*

In the above comments, both **Robin** and **Charlie** express an understanding of the organisational circumstances surrounding them. However, what is crucial for management to also appreciate is how this sense of limitation can negatively affect the person working amid it on an everyday basis (Lewis, 2000). For **Robin**, there was a sense that underinvestment in the tools that their team needs to make the business money meant, “*we have to do it with our hands tied behind our back because our business cases don't get prioritised*”. **Charlie** evidently felt similarly frustrated by the sense of merely “*asking to do your job, but the tools that you need are not priority*”. These negative manifesting impressions are deleterious to both the people and performance of an organisation, because they essentially amount to a feeling of being let down by the organisation or representative authorities therein.

No single manager can fix this common and deep-rooted issue with a simple click of their fingers. Organisations often operate under conditions of resource scarcity (Smith and Lewis, 2011), and employees will therefore experience the strain. But that does not mean a manager is out of options to ameliorate the situation. As unique as every case and context will be for a manager to deal with, the frank yet optimistic reflection of interviewee **Avery** below on how to support people and performance simultaneously seems broadly applicable to many:

Avery: *It's about having that leadership that is able to consistently be really engaged, really positive. They don't hide away in offices, they're really communicative. They praise when praise is due. They push people along when things need to be pushed along. You know, they tell you it's s**t when it's s**t, but they work with you about how "we're" gonna find a way through it.*

That I think helps to make you more happy in work because you feel engaged with it. You feel part of it, you understand it. And, therefore, as long as you've got a decent work ethic and you like the kind of work that you do and you feel you've got the environment to do that in, you will push on through and you'll feel relatively happy.

Avery's perspective above acutely captures an appreciation of imperfect organisational circumstances. In true paradox fashion, however, it also attends the positive outcomes that can nevertheless be realised despite them. If high performance is to be attained and maintained through collaboration, managers must vocalise their honest assessment of the situation, attending to both the positives and negatives. On the one hand, colleagues can more easily understand each other without sugar-coated comms. But, on the other, care must be taken such that candidness does not become felt as denigration. There is little likelihood that either overblown positivity or jading pessimism could produce positive organisational outcomes. Rather, as **Avery** pivots to say, managers “*work with you about how “we’re” gonna find a way through it*”. Therein the “*work*” and the “*we’re*” lies the more positive path ahead, through collegial camaraderie. A manager with this disposition not only appreciates the problematic situation that needs to be sorted but also appreciates the combined value of their part and the part of others in optimising it.

8.1.2. Action 2: Care

The suggestion that management needs to *care* may seem so fundamental that it requires no mention. However, it is precisely because of its fundamentality that it would be remiss of a framework designed to guide management to omit this essential action. Caring for colleagues and, by association, what they themselves care about is a potent force for positive transformation for people and performance in challenging organisational circumstances. As interviewee **Alex** notes, this requires a primary understanding that while we naturally apply terms such as worker and employee, manager and boss to folk within the organisation, before and beyond that, “*we’re all human, we all have lives*”.

Difficult circumstances can arise outside the “walls” of the organisation, in the personal lives of the people upon which it partly depends. How representatives of the organisation act in such events – be they teammates, managers, directors, or the entity regarded as HR – can have long lasting effects on the perspectives of the people who live through them. The

simple power of caring in the right way at the right time can be exemplified most prominently through a reflection of interviewee **Aiden** concerning a tragic and sudden bereavement that they experienced eleven years prior while working for Solet:

***Aiden:** It was like 9 o'clock at night on a Monday, and I was ringing one of the managers just to tell them. I had a huge bouquet of flowers delivered the next day from [Solet] just to say, "thinking of you and here's a big hug".*

Aiden was not universally positive about all their managers and colleagues throughout their fifteen plus years at the company, but they looked back comparatively fondly on this compassionate act of this manager all those years ago. As is perhaps best summarised by a reflection of interviewee **Jordan**, in tough times like these when one may need it more than ever:

***Jordan:** If you've got the support of your line manager or director... that's calming knowing that you've got that support there. You're not just another colleague. You're not just another number. You are cared for.*

Acts of care need not always be grand gestures during dark times, nor be in response to life outside of work. Indeed, it is important that care is expressed consistently through everyday organisational interactions. An emotive expression of interviewee **Casey** captures the visceral feeling that a perceived careless disregard for one's professional needs can evoke:

***Casey:** People letting you down, people committing to doing things and not doing it. A big part of my working life is if I say I'm gonna do something, then I'm the bloody postman: I deliver.*

I hate it when people think it's OK to let you down. Go, "well, my priorities changed". Sometimes that happens, but you let people know and you warn them. You don't just let them down... that's corrosive.

Successful organisations are the fruit of fruitful relationships. Their very existence is therefore a product of dependability in interaction. In the above excerpt, **Casey** is not necessarily referring to a manager or management, *per se*. Yet, nevertheless, those who are in management must be especially mindful of the possibility that they may be perceived as not caring about colleagues amid the rush and mess of organisational life. There may be a multitude of excusable reasons as to why someone may have failed to honour what they previously appear to have promised. But, as **Casey's** powerful choice of words, "*hate*",

suggests, it is important to ideally forewarn or – if that is not possible – subsequently clear the air with colleagues to avoid the corrosion of professional interpersonal relations.

8.1.3. Action 3: Talk

The importance of communication in organisations is not new to management. But there is much still to be said on the topic of one form of communication in particular: *talking*. Comments within the research interviews on the unique benefits of talking in the organisation ranged greatly. For example, **Chris** noted the subtle power of simple “*water cooler moments*” that can connect people from different departments that may otherwise never meet if it were not for “*chatting*” there and then. Further, **Charlie** noted the difficulties of a general shift towards asynchronous, written forms of communication, remarking, “*you don't quite get the answer you would get if you spoke to someone like we're speaking now, it's a lot easier*”.

With the risks of so-called silo working that colleagues **Avery** and **Casey** observed in the company, such as not knowing “*what's happening in adjacent spaces*” (**Casey**) and “*wasting energy*” because several departments are “*all trying to do the same thing, but none of them talk to each other*” (**Avery**), water cooler moments may not be the elixir, but the immediate and dynamic information exchange that face-to-face conversation naturally offers certainly makes it an important human resource worth not neglecting.

Talking is not always easy, especially if it is employed to tackle preexisting organisational issues. It requires courage and a thick skin to actively solicit information that one may prefer not to confront. But when candid conversation becomes the norm in organisational communication, it can be a sensible way to overcome obstacles that frustrate people and performance alike. This can be seen in **Stevie's** conversational method of problem-solving, below:

Stevie: *The three of us aren't shy at putting ourselves forward. We will actually go in and take the flack as well, because some of the sessions we have are literally allowing the users to actually effectively say what they want. And that's really the only way, asking for open, honest opinions from them as to how we're gonna learn what's important to them, for us to then know what development we need to do... So, part of those sessions is obviously getting from the horse's mouth what the problems are.*

If you just sit there and actually assume that you know what the issues are, you won't get anywhere.

The above approach to fielding opinions in an open forum can have dually positive effects upon people and performance if conducted appropriately. Regarding the potential benefits to organisational performance, as interviewee **Robin** notes, it is through talking that it is possible to gain *“all these different life experiences and ways of looking at things... Even if you don't use them, it's better to know everything that everyone thinks and then make a decision, because they might have thought of something that you haven't.”* Meanwhile, for the people whose opinions are sincerely acknowledged and duly responded to, this can lead to a greater sense of commitment. As **Jamie** suggests, *“knowing that your opinions are heard, but also that actually things can change by you giving your opinion... it just gives you a bit more ownership... makes you care a bit more”*.

A crucial sub-dimension of talking that many interviewees alluded to was how candid conversations between employees and their line-managers were a sign of a strong interpersonal professional bond. For **Jordan**, it was the ability to *“moan”* to their manager about work-related difficulties and thus have *“a good vent”*. For **Stevie**, it was the ability for them and their manager to *“actually say what we want, get it off your chest, and then it's forgotten and we can move on”*. **Drew** appreciated with a former manager that they were *“able to have a really good, honest chat, and you didn't feel like you had to hold anything back”*, while **Jean** recalled their *“best”* manager (**Billie**) who was *“so straightforward”* with them, but with *“an element of respect there”*.

It is improbable that all manager-subordinate dyads will be able to achieve this level of rapport. But, with how it stands to benefit information transmission within the organisation and positive emotion within employees, it is certainly wise for management to attempt to reach this apex of interpersonal and professional interaction. With the demonstrated benefits of talking on interpersonal relationships, this also extends to more general organisational communication. Whether its casual exchanges, candid feedback, or simply opening the opportunity for constructive dialogue, talking is an essential action for fostering rapport and working through the complexities of organisational life.

8.1.4. Action 4: Involve

From the perspective of the interviewees, involvement appeared to be an important element of organisation for both people and performance in two primary forms. The first of these was how management involves employees in important *thought processes*, while the second was how it harnesses them in important *operational processes*. Each of these are covered in turn.

The importance of involving employees in important managerial thought processes is easy to overlook, but difficult to understate. It can be a slippery slope from the point that the performers of the organisation lose faith in whether management is working according to a rational plan. This can be most prominently seen in the comments of **Jean** and **Robin** regarding sales targets. **Jean**, for example, expressed how the current lack of evidence upon which sales targets were set may have been counterproductively demotivating the company's sales staff. Comparing to a previous employer that used historical data to forecast targets, **Jean** expressed concern that senior management at Solet was not explaining the logic underlying the targets. This they felt was leading to a lack of trust in the targets and a loss of respect for the managers setting them. **Robin**, unfortunately, was experiencing a similar issue firsthand:

***Robin:** There's been no transparency... and there was no chance to input and have a conversation... before it went ahead... So, when people try and report on the status of this test now, it's just kind of like, "oh, we think it's working". But... that's not good enough if it's actually affecting our numbers. Our targets haven't changed because there's no numbers to track... Everything's speculative. But it's my actual job and my sales team's actual jobs to hit those numbers... What's the point in me doing it?*

As can be seen from **Robin's** experience, the sense of distrust, disrespect, and demotivation to which **Jean** alluded appears to have set in. When managers do not appear to have a convincingly defensible position on how they have arrived at their decisions, negative perceptions begin to filtrate into an employee's perspective, which is naturally going to make them less inclined to go above and beyond for the organisational cause. It is therefore critical that management can credibly qualify (and, if necessary, quantify) their thought processes.

Overlapping with how managers involve employees in their thought processes is how they also involve (harness) them in operational processes. Organising is a collaborative effort in dynamic and unpredictable circumstances. As **Jude** suggests below, organisational success relies on an ongoing process of teamwork and experimentation:

***Jude:** When a business is developing, you do have to try different things. Because you don't have the ultimate answer, and there isn't a blueprint to say, "this is the path you should follow". So, certain things have to be tried, and you have to open yourself up to the fact that some of those will fail. But it is again about prepping the team and saying to the team "right, OK, we're gonna give this a go. If this works, that's great. If it doesn't, then we need to try something different or we just need to tweak it".*

This involvement of employees in important organisational processes is, however, not just significant for the success of the company in isolation. It is also a substantive part of what keeps employees interested in the company. As **Avery's** comment below suggests, a sense that one is developing the organisation goes hand-in-hand with a sense of self-development:

***Avery:** Give them the framework to develop from the decisions they've made so they can do things even better again the next time... Because if I'm not being allowed to make these decisions or I'm not being given that freedom... you know, I'm not developing or learning as a person or being of real value.*

Involving employees in the organisation's managerial and operational processes is not merely an administrative necessity; it is a human one. Involving employees in managerial thought processes can help employees become more confident in the organisation's decision-making by raising their awareness of the rationale underpinning it. There is also the element within this of employees feeling sufficiently valued by management for being party to important information. As **Drew** reflected with regards to the CFO's monthly briefings, "it makes you feel that the workers have ownership". At the same time, as is implied by **Avery's** perspective above, the sense of actively being involved in operational processes allows employees to feel that they are of more value to themselves and the organisation through their contribution. While these two forms of involvement work in tandem, they each serve to align the organisation's ambition with employees' desire to be not just a spare part but an integral part of it.

8.1.5. Action 5: Orient

Many of the comments that the interviewees gave with regards to optimising organisational conditions for people and performance had an essence of directionality about them. For example, **Tyler** referred to the unnerving feeling of not *“going down the right path”*, while **Jude** referred to having *“been guided down a different route”* and *“moved in a different direction”*. Similarly, **Jamie** raised the importance of having a *“clear direction”*, and **Chris** drew upon the unease of *“looking at the mountain task in front of you”* without knowing *“how to approach it”*. Each of these comments are indicative of a need for people to feel oriented while in motion in the organisation.

Ellis, from their perspective of a manager who was responsible for integrating newly acquired subsidiaries into a growing Solet family, also made metaphorical reference to orientation. As they say, there can be *“a lot of uncertainty among the teams”* in these scenarios, and *“making sure that people are clear of the journey that they're going on and where they are on that journey”* is key to a positive stage of change for the sake of colleagues and the company. While drawing on a particularly intensive seasonal period for Solet's operations (Christmas), **Ellis** went on to say the following:

***Ellis:** It's not just about saying we got Christmas coming up; it's hard. It's about saying we got Christmas coming up; it's gonna be hard. However, this is how that fits into the bigger picture of what we're trying to achieve... I feel that I'm able to help people navigate through some of those uncertain times and get the best out of them.*

This form of feedforwarding that situates foreseeable upcoming experiences within a longer span can help employees to understand that the new, potentially unpleasant experience may only be transient, and will hopefully be followed by better ones to come thereafter. Of course, so as not to inadvertently conjure a sense that management just feeds the workforce promises that cannot be kept, orientation to this effect does need to lead to the specified destination. People do not respond well to inconsistency between words and actions.

Another important form of orientation to which several interviewees referred was characteristically of a more visual nature. For example, **Quinn** noted the importance of *“getting the scope of what you're doing”*, while **Jordan** and **Avery** framed their perspectives of what produces optimal worker productivity in terms of jigsaw puzzles and thus one's place and integral part in a bigger picture:

Jordan: *I would say that it is... having a clear knowledge of what the objectives are and how you fit into that puzzle... And then knowing that you are valued, and you are contributing.*

Avery: *I think it has to start with you understanding what your purpose is... and that also your bit is being put into some context as what the bigger picture is... Why is that one bit that you're doing so important that we're asking you to do it? Where does that fit into the jigsaw and where else can you learn about that, so you actually understand the value of it?*

Management, from one's direct line manager to the directorate leading the company, is the collective entity that must ensure all employees understand the direction towards which everyone is oriented such that they can coordinate their actions amongst it all. Devoid of this clear direction, employees can feel disoriented. **Casey** expressed this as a sense of “chaos, disorder, disorganisation, zigzagging, inconsistency”, and **Morgan** felt sudden shifts can leave employees wondering “when's our feet gonna be pulled from under us again?”. As such, if such changes are unavoidable in the flow of organisation, it is paramount that managers reorient their people as soon as possible before they, as **Francis** phrased it, “go somewhere where they know what they're doing”.

8.1.6. Action 6: Nurture

The final essential action drawn from the interviews brings to the fore the fundamental purpose of a performance manager: to *nurture*. In this way, management acts as a facilitator of organisational fruition. Management must, as **Jude** suggests, “let people do what they're good at, what they're hired to do...”. To achieve this, managers must be adaptive to the varying needs of their team members, offering just the right amount of contact and resources.

Many interviewees stressed the importance of being afforded the freedom to self-manage. For **Jamie**, “being micromanaged” or “being dictated to about exactly how you need to do your role” was doubly deleterious to productivity and happiness. As they went on to suggest, “there's nothing worse than constantly being followed up on by your line manager or someone else... before they've even given you time to put any actions in place”. **Ellis**

expressed similar views from their perspective on how excessive control can stifle productivity by frustrating people with unnecessary “bureaucracy”:

***Ellis:** If you're having to constantly go and ask for approval or go up the chain... that will affect morale, that will affect motivation, it will increase frustration, and those things will drive a decrease in productivity.*

At the same time, it is important not to leave employees with the impression that they are stuck or stranded. For example, while **Elliot** felt that they now have a supportive manager who takes time to ensure that they are confident in their role, they contrasted this with how in previous organisations they have experienced a latent expectation that “*if you don't get it... you should get it*”. **Val** offered a comparative view from a nurturing managerial perspective:

***Val:** If somebody's struggling, help them, you know, find out if there's something; do they need more information, more training? Can we help them? Yeah, just work as a team really. We're all in it together.*

To nurture employees is also to provide road for their inner drive. The direction and extent of this is different from person to person. Some people may be perfectly content exactly as they are, while others have a strong self-development itch to scratch. Management that can simultaneously serve people and performance is one that can pave the way for, as **Casey** phrased it, “*forward movement, feeling like you're getting somewhere*” for anyone who wants it.

Several other interviewees touched on this important topic, also. **Jean**, for example, commented that, “*people want to achieve in their work, they wanna feel proud of the work that they do*”. Conversely, **Jamie**, noted the risk of there being a lack of self-developmental provisions, whereby “*not having that opportunity to grow and innovate, you become... quite bored and... quite disenchanted*”. With how important self-development can be to striving employees, the ramifications of an organisation not being able to fulfil this ambition is that talent may leach from the ranks. As **Jude** suggests, “*that's where you find people then go to competitors... because they still like the job they're doing, but they just want the next level*”.

As the role of management is to get the most from people for the organisation, by providing the right balance of freedom, guidance, and sense of opportunity, managers can influence

an environment where employees feel valued for their work and encouraged to continue contributing to their organisation. Not only is this likely to prime conditions for greater productivity through employee self-investment in the present, but also to increase the probability that talent will be retained as employees look forward to a fruitful future *within* the organisation rather than *without* it. Ultimately, a nurturing managerial approach promotes a positive employee experience, which in turn potentiates overall organisational performance through the inspiration and enablement of employees to perform.

8.2. Chapter summary

This final results chapter has presented the findings of an empirically informed thought experiment performed with the views of the interviewed employees of Solet. It employed disciplined imaginative reasoning to envision what managerial actions could help to bridge the gap between the imperfect performance management reality that employees (and organisations) often experience and the abstract utopian scenario of paradox ‘transcendence’ (Lewis, 2000: 764). While this was chiefly a conceptual exercise, it was nevertheless grounded by the experience of its participating “internal consultants” who offered their thoughts for the thought experiment (Aguinis et al., 2023).

This process produced six essential managerial actions – *appreciate*, *care*, *talk*, *involve*, *orient*, and *nurture* – which serve as a guide for managers seeking to work through the paradoxical task of ensuring both optimal employee happiness and productivity. In short summary of these, *appreciating* ensures managers remain mindful of less-than-ideal organisational realities and employees’ experiences of them. *Caring* about colleagues, and what they themselves care about, extends beyond professional obligations, as it entails a sincere concern for people irrespective of their role; it is for this reason a foundation of constructive communication and collaboration. *Talking* functions as a particularly high-value communication currency for the way it engenders openness and reduces distance in both interpersonal and organisational relations. *Involving* employees in both organisational thought processes and operational processes which they deem important helps them to understand the underlying significance of their work. *Orienting* provides employees with clarity regarding professional purpose and direction, both individually and within the

broader organisational landscape, which helps them to see where their “puzzle piece” fits into the bigger picture. Finally, *nurturing* entails the dynamic balance of autonomy and support that managers must give to allow employees to contribute meaningfully to both the organisation’s mission and their own.

Together, these actions form a framework designed to optimise the employee experience while navigating the enduring tensions of performance management. By embedding these tenets of management “ACTION” into policy design and daily practice, managers may become equiposed to enhance organisational conditions for both people and performance through their effect on everyday employee experiences. The following chapter discusses the findings of this and the three previous results chapters in relation to the literature and the investigation’s overall aim, research questions, and objectives.

Chapter 9. Discussion

This investigation began by defining the performance management paradox as the unresolved tension between an organisation's pursuit of performance enhancement and the adverse experience of this demand by its employees. Through a review of the literature, it showed this to be a problem for both the people and performance of an organisation through the negative impact of organisational performance pressures upon the well-being of employees, which consequently reduces their will and ability to work well for the organisation. It then set out to explore this paradox, principally from the employee experience perspective, with the aim of generating novel insights for managers throughout the ranks to leverage for the mutual benefit of their organisation's people and performance.

To this end, this chapter discusses the empirical findings of this investigation in the context of the extant literature and theoretical perspectives of paradox and employee experience. To begin, the discussion centres on the enduring nature of the paradox – its imperviousness to resolution (Cunha and Putnam, 2019) – examining it through the three theoretical interpretations outlined in the methodology (i.e., the system-inherent, socially constructed, and probabilistic perspectives). This is done to fully appreciate the ongoing challenge that managers encounter and how they may yet overcome it.

To inform this practice, the discussion then turns to each of this investigation's three research questions: *How can management simultaneously serve the people and performance of their organisation? Why do employees come to, stay at, and leave their organisation? And what is essential from management when working through the performance management paradox?* Following this, the chapter concludes with the investigation's contributions to management scholarship and practice, methodological limitations to generalisability, and recommendations for future management research and practice.

9.1. The paradoxical obstacle to performance management mastery

Managers encounter paradox because of the contradictory demands of interdependent entities of organisation (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Hahn and Knight, 2021a). From Addams' (1902) lament over the fractious relations between industrial workers and owners, through Staw's (1986) doubt – but also hope – that management could make employees both happy and productive, to Glover et al.'s (2023) contemplation of how managers can simultaneously attend to an organisation's need to be profitable and the need of its people to be well, there has been a long history of management studies involving the contradictory yet interdependent demands of people and performance management.

To advance managerial understanding of how to overcome the deleterious effects of this paradox, this investigation has continued this long line of inquiry with a specific focus on the employee experience in this context. But, to ascertain what management can do to mutually benefit people and performance requires first an awareness of what management cannot. Therefore, to define this boundary of management agency to effectuate positive change, the following subsections examine the findings of this investigation from the three paradox perspectives defined in Chapter 4 (Section 4.1.1): the system-inherent, socially constructed, and probabilistic perspectives.

9.1.1. System-inherence of the performance management paradox

The system-inherent view of paradox attends to the structural origins of paradox. It essentially posits that paradoxes arise from the foundational structures and obligations of organisations (Schad and Bansal, 2018). In line with this interpretation, the current investigation highlights how tensions within performance management arise in part from the deeply embedded interdependencies between stakeholders who co-create an organisation. As shown in Chapter 5 through the analysis of company documentation, Solet's directors seem acutely aware of the need for the organisation to please all stakeholders (i.e., its guests, property owners, workforce, suppliers, community and environment, and shareholders and lenders); yet they also disclosed their understanding that always achieving this simultaneity of satisfaction is not a realistic possibility. This awareness reflects the ontological feature of paradox that suggests that organisations are entrenched in

preconditions that generate competing demands and inevitable trade-offs (Loon et al., 2019).

A primary example of such latent structures that produce paradoxical outcomes is the pressure upon the company's directors to limit liabilities in the form of employee 'wages and salaries, annual leave and sick leave' (Solet, 2023b: 26); though ensuring this may mitigate the issue of dissatisfying financial investors for overspending, it can simultaneously give rise to employee dissatisfaction with the return on *their* investment. The high degree of communality (AVE = 0.765) among the employee HAW sub-constructs, work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction (Chapter 6, Section 6.4.1.2, Table 6.8), provides insight into how this inherent conflict of interests may perpetuate the performance management paradox. This shared variance suggests that when employees feel greater dissatisfaction with their pay (JS2), they also tend to feel less enthused by their job (WE2) and generally less committed to their organisation (OC1-OC3). Such unhappiness at work has been shown in previous studies to correspond with poorer personal and organisational performance (e.g., Harrison et al., 2006; Edmans, 2012; Kim et al., 2013). It follows from this that the paradoxical nature of performance management can arise from managerial strategies that, while intended to optimise the company's (financial) performance, also produce effects counter to this as employees correspondingly reduce their investment (Lewis, 2000; Stohl and Cheney, 2001).

This investigation concurs with the system-inherent paradox perspective in accepting that an extent of the performance management paradox stems from an organisation's plurality of indebtedness to the expectations of its stakeholders in exchange for their respective resource contributions. This ultimately points to the fact that, rather than being eliminable, the latent tension between stakeholder interests is an enduring challenge of organisation (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989; Cunha and Putnam, 2019). With no definitive solution, as Smith and Lewis (2011: 382) suggest, there remains only the option of ongoing negotiation through 'purposeful and cyclical responses to paradox over time'.

9.1.2. Social construction of the performance management paradox

Differently from the system-inherent perspective, which foregrounds sociomaterial circumstances of organising (e.g., the contradictory demands of interdependent stakeholders), the socially constructed perspective highlights the role that social interactions play in forming paradoxical and contentious situations (Putnam et al., 2016). In other words, this view observes how people coproduce paradox. As Waldman et al. (2019: 2) suggest, ‘individuals and their social interactions serve as the micro-foundations for higher level organizational paradoxes’.

Due to its close focus on the employee experience, the findings of this investigation support this view that interaction is the process through which paradox manifests (Ford and Backoff, 1988). Statistical support for the underpinning propositions of the MEO model (proposed in Chapter 3) is indicative of this process. Recalling that this experiential model posited that *for every perceived management action, there is a relative and corresponding employee reaction*, the significant direct and total effects of HPMA upon HAW (reported in Chapter 6, Section 6.5.2) suggest that paradoxical circumstances emerge ‘through actors’ sensemaking and experience’ (Hahn and Knight, 2021a: 363).

From a perspective that encapsulates employees’ cognition, emotion, and reaction in social interaction (Itam and Ghosh, 2020; Batat, 2022; Yadav and Vihari, 2023), the findings of this investigation reveal that what employees think of their management and organisation significantly influences how they feel (i.e., happy/unhappy) at work, which, together, condition their response towards the organisation. In other words, an employee’s thoughts about management and the organisation provoke reactions via cognition, while their emergent feelings evoke reactions through emotion. As this is an immersive – holistic – experience, this would be neither merely a cognitive response based on thoughts nor purely an emotional one based on feeling.

It can be inferred from this that employees’ experience-based interpretations of management activity shape their engagement, commitment, and satisfaction, which, in turn, feed into broader organisational dynamics (for better or worse). This is indicative of a distinctly “interactive” phenomenon, comprising an entanglement of people’s actions, interpretations, and reactions. As employees react to their experience of management

activity, in accordance with the positivity (or negativity) of their subjective perspective, they enact patterns of organisational alignment (or misalignment) through their affectable engagement and commitment (or lack thereof). Consequently, to the extent that these views are negative, management action in this interactive process can be seen to perpetuate rather than attenuate the performance management paradox (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

A particularly illustrative example of this is the strong negative view of **Anon** that was drawn upon in Chapter 5. Their perception that managers did not care about the quality of the work (*"all could be trash... they wouldnt care [sic]"*) or the workers themselves (*"we're all just dots that look teh same to them [sic]"*) was expressed not only in their written words (*"what a joke"*) but also evinced in their lack of commitment to the organisation (selecting *"strongly disagree"* for all three items). This is a sign that perceived negative management action begets negative employee reaction: a simple notion, but one that speaks to the impact of counterproductive reaction formation upon the organisation (Smith and Lewis, 2011) originating from an impression that management is essentially inconsiderate.

Viewing subjective experience as a holistic amalgamation of thoughts and feelings that influence reactions in participatory organisational processes – much like the system-inherent view – reveals that the performance management paradox must contain an element of insolubility. Recalling Roethlisberger and Dickson's (1961: 270) understanding from their interviews at the Hawthorn Works, that there is an 'emotional significance' and 'implicit meaning' that the employee themselves conjures as they interact with 'the reality about [them]', it seems that there may always be a degree of negative reaction formation that management cannot avoid. But, while this investigation has drawn out instances of this potentially being the case (such as **Anon's** criticism of management), sufficient instances have also been found of the antithesis of this: positive perceptions of management begetting positive reactions towards the organisation. It is for this reason that the next section looks to the potential for management to prevent negative organisational dynamics despite the accepted extent of uncontrollability arising from persistent pressures and personal perceptions in (systems of) social interaction.

9.1.3. Probability of the performance management paradox

The probabilistic interpretation of paradox, as put forth by Hahn and Knight (2021a), is based upon both the system-inherent and socially constructed perspectives. It is according to this view that ‘social construction and inherent characteristics together account for the salience of paradox’ (Hahn and Knight, 2021a: 374). In the context of the performance management paradox, this entails the sociomaterial inevitability of human interdependence in organisation and the propensity therein for counterproductive reaction formation to emerge when people’s differing ideas, principles, or actions clash (Stohl and Cheney, 2001).

Importantly, while this perspective begins with the entanglement of objective circumstances and subjective interpretations conspiring to produce counterproductivity within the organisation, it also alludes to the potential for managers to effectuate change – for better or worse – within the system of social interaction. As Hahn and Knight (2021a: 377) write, patterns of action cumulate ‘to make some paradoxes... more likely to endure, and others less so’. What this suggests is that, *ceteris paribus*, managers can make a positive difference.

A key example in this investigation that aligns with this idea is **Avery’s** account in Chapter 8 (Section 8.1.1) regarding how managers might ideally act in imperfectible situations through collegial camaraderie by working through work-related problems *together*. Yes, the situation may be less than ideal to begin with (**Avery’s** pithy language was somewhat more colourful), but the approach that a manager takes to resolving it *alongside* colleagues is likely to ameliorate any adverse experience of the underlying demand to deliver best possible organisational outcomes.

Drawing also from Chapter 8 (Section 8.1.5), the same could be said for **Ellis’** intention to orient their team prior to and through periods of intensity and uncertainty or **Stevie’s** conversational approach to problem-solving (Section 8.1.3). It is through this combination of feedforward and feedback that managers can work through problems as and when they arise along the course of organisation to consistently work towards optimal outcomes. These instances, drawn from the everyday working lives of people, illustrate how the performance management paradox is not merely a fixed phenomenon but situationally dependent and malleable to some variable degree in *actu*.

In a way, this perspective opens inquiry to explore *when* paradoxical tensions might escalate or subside based on managerial activity. Indeed, this enticing notion that managers can in effect alter the ‘probabilistic potentiality’ of paradox (Hahn and Knight, 2021a: 365) for the mutual benefit of their organisation’s people and performance has been central to this investigation’s line of inquiry. To this end, while remaining mindful of the material and discursive restrictions thus discussed, the following section of this discussion turns to the three research questions that led the inquiry into how management might “tap the positive potential” of the performance management paradox (Lewis, 2000).

9.2. Addressing the research questions

9.2.1. How can management simultaneously serve the people and performance of their organisation? (RQ1)

In the conceptual review of Chapter 2, it was established that there is a potential for an organisation’s constant performance imperative to paradoxically undermine itself by adversely impacting the people who must work to fulfil it. Given this evidently undesirable possibility, this investigation sought to identify how management can respond to the performance demands of their organisation via the employee experience (RO1). The exploratory modelling reported in Chapter 6 provided valuable insight into how management can achieve this.

The model comprised empirical indicators denoting employee perceptions of management action (HPMA), overall organisation character (POC-A and POC-R), and their general alignment towards the organisation in terms of their combined work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction (HAW). Regarding the question of “how” management can serve people and performance simultaneously, it is important to note that the model itself only identifies an experiential *mechanism* through which these dual gains can emerge, and that this operates beyond the direct control of any manager. However, it can nevertheless be averred that a greater awareness of this mechanism can inform the interactive *means* through which management can make those gains.

Prior intervention-based research into the broader HPO framework, from which HPMA was derived, suggests that these managerial means entail first fielding employees’ perspectives

on their organisation and its management, to then focus managerial attention on these key areas. It is through this process that managers can raise scores in these dimensions above pre-intervention levels or mitigate their decline during difficult circumstances (de Waal, 2012a; 2017).

The current investigation helps to inform this process through the confirmed statistical relationship between employees' perceptions of HPMA and their HAW, coupled with the added intriguing finding that this relationship is partially mediated by POC-R but not POC-A. This advances previous understanding on how management can simultaneously serve people and performance by confirming the specific association of employee perceptions of management action (i.e., HPMA) upon HAW – rather than the broader array of HPO actions and characteristics (de Waal, 2018; Mroueh and de Waal, 2020) – as well as adding to this an understanding of the relative importance of relational organisational characteristics over aspirational ones for promoting employee HAW.

To elaborate on the importance of this latter finding, while organisations often proclaim their aspiration to be market leaders in their specialism (Chun, 2017), as exemplified in the case of Solet in Chapter 5 (Section 5.2.1), the absence of a significant relationship between POC-A and HAW suggests that such organisational characteristics are not those which positively influence employees' willingness to contribute to the organisation. Instead, it appears that while an employee's perception of management action predicts their impression of the organisation in terms of aspirational and relational characteristics similarly (55% of the variance in POC-A; 57.6% of the variance in POC-R), the relational characteristics are what matter most in the employee experience. This finding corroborates that of Chun (2017), whereby organisational *integrity*, containing three of the POC-R indicators (*honest*, *trustworthy*, and *socially-responsible*) showed the strongest association with employees' identification and satisfaction with their organisation.

This stresses the importance of management gaining a greater understanding of what their workforce cares to witness in the organisation. For example, in the IPMA of the current study (Chapter 6, Section 6.7.2), it can be seen that Solet's aspirational characteristics of *ambitiousness* (POC-A1) and *achievement orientation* (POC-A2) were the two highest-ranking variables in terms of the employees' perception that the organisation embodied them, but that they were the least important variables when it came to employees' HAW.

Contrastingly, the joint strongest POC predictors of employees' HAW were the company's *trustworthiness* (POC-R3) and *supportiveness* (POC-R5), but, perhaps concerningly for Solet, these were below the average indicator performance. Equipped with these acute insights, however, managers can work to improve these impressions for the mutual benefit of people and performance.

Findings from the studies of Rego et al. (2010) and Singh et al. (2018) further corroborate the idea that focusing managerial attention on the impact of their actions on the perceived relational character of the organisation can be mutually beneficial for people and performance. Both of these investigations included measures of employees' perceptions of their sense of honesty and trustworthiness in their organisation. Rego et al. (2010) found these indicators related to an employee's affective well-being and supervisor-rated OCB, while Singh et al. (2018) found them to be associated with happiness and self-reported engagement. In combination with the current investigation, these prior studies highlight the substantive influence of management action on employees' impressions of the organisation and a range of beneficial outcomes for performance.

Further to the study of organisational character, the IPMA of management action was also revelatory in that it revealed that *management focusing on results* (HPMA4) was the least important HPMA for determining HAW (Chapter 6, Section 6.7.1). Moreover, *management holding organisational members responsible for their results* (HPMA6) was the next least important indicator. While these are no doubt important HPMA's for performance, contrastingly, at the opposite end of the scale, the HPMA's of greatest impact upon people were that *management welcomes change* (HPMA9), followed by *management inspires organisational members to accomplish extraordinary results* (HPMA10), and *management coaches organisational members to achieve better results* (HPMA3). This finer resolution provided by IPMA illuminates which perceived actions may be of greater and lesser importance when trying to respond to organisational performance demands via the employee experience.

A closer examination of the higher-impact HPMA's of management *inspiring* employees and *coaching* them to achieve results shows strong parallels with prior research examining favourable managerial behaviours. For example, Avolio and Bass' (2004: 95) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire has items within the section on 'individual consideration' that

refer to managers who *'spend time teaching and coaching others'* and *'help others to develop their strengths'*. By employing this questionnaire in their respective investigations, Walumbwa et al. (2008) and Samad et al. (2022) found employee responses were positively associated with not only expressions of their general well-being, satisfaction with their job and manager, but also greater organisational commitment, OCB, and intention to stay in the organisation. Similarly, Kilroy et al.'s (2023) adaptation of Heslin et al.'s (2005) survey of front-line manager behaviours suggests that managers who coach their team members by being available, listening, and subsequently offering useful suggestions and opportunities for performance improvement can generate within employees a sense of organisational and supervisor support, OCB, and commitment. The relative high impact of the HPMA statements referring to management that coaches and inspires better (if not extraordinary) results adds to this prior evidence, suggesting that such managerial behaviours contribute to positive organisational outcomes via positive employee perceptions.

Expanding on this further, comparisons can be drawn between these two especially impactful HPMAs and investigations into servant and engaging leadership. For example, Kaltainen and Hakanen (2022) found that the more employees felt that their supervisor encouraged the use of their talents, the more they felt engaged, adaptable, resilient, and that they were performing well. Similarly, Schaufeli (2015: 462) found that employees who viewed their manager as being *'able to enthuse others for his/her plans'* and who *'encourages team members to cooperate'* expressed greater engagement and commitment. This reinforces the notion that, irrespective of their "style", managers who cultivate stronger organisational alignment in employees do so by making them feel inspired and enabled to perform (Alvesson, 2020).

Beyond coaching and inspiration, an intriguing finding in this investigation was that the strongest determinant of employee HAW among the HPMA array was the perception that *management welcomes change*. This raises a compelling question: Why would perceived openness to change influence HAW more than coaching or inspiration?

An interesting explanation lies in employee perception. As survey items such as the HPMA indicators inherently capture employee-perceived management activity, rather than objective managerial behaviours, it is essential to recognise how employees interpret the statement *"management welcomes change"* in the questionnaire context. From the

egological perspective of concerned circumspection, employees inevitably compare this statement to their broader experience of how management adapts and responds to change that concerns them. Findings from Javed et al. (2019) support this assertion, showing that employees who perceive their manager as attentive to new opportunities, receptive to new ideas, and willing to improve work processes experience greater workplace well-being – denoted by a holistic combination of safety, ease, support, and interpersonal acceptance – and exhibit greater (manager-rated) innovativeness. Accordingly, it would appear that such managerial openness not only enhances employee well-being but also serves as a driver of higher performance.

Overall, this comparative analysis between the most influential HPMAs and prior literature on mutual gains for people and performance emphasises the power of the employee's perception that managers encourage employees to perform for the organisation. Specifically, this entails an impression that managers take one's contributions seriously and facilitate change that favours personal interest (Brown et al., 2005). When employees experience the antithesis of this – that management frustrates change for the better – their enthusiasm is logically bound to diminish. Perception reigns in the 'realm of the worker' (Kilroy et al., 2023: 516), and the evidence of this investigation suggests that managers would do well to leverage that power.

Before drawing to a close on this research question, there remains the important matter of the extension of Alvesson's (2020) "upbeat leadership" critique that was raised in Chapter 3 (principally Section 3.4). This critique drew attention to the tendency among investigations – especially statistical – to perpetuate an idealised image of management that is inconsistent with the reality experienced by most employees. The PLS-SEM analysis of this investigation could be accused of perpetuating this very issue. After all, the HPO scores shown in Figure 5.4 (Chapter 5) and the mean of the summed HPMAs shown in Table 6.2 (Chapter 6) both confirm that most employees surveyed perceived management to be less than ideal, and so it seems fair to ask, as Cunha and Putnam (2019) do, what is the use of yet another suggestion of managerial best practice?

In response to this, there is a key reason why this issue may be more innocuous than initially assumed. Indeed, the theoretical MEO model tested through these quantitative analyses gives an idea of managerial "best practice". But it is important to remember that HPMA

merely served as an empirical indicator of a broader idea, illustrative of an important part of the employee experience. The questionnaire data in this investigation comprised a simple cross-sectional extraction of employee perceptions about their management, scaled by pre-validated measures that have been associated with beneficial outcomes for people and performance in previous studies (e.g., de Waal and Goedegebuure, 2017; Mroueh and de Waal, 2020). As suggested at the beginning of this section, this has permitted a richer understanding of the theorised experiential *mechanism* through which managers can simultaneously serve the people and performance of their organisation. The relevance of this research endeavour is that the validation and exploration of this mechanism has helped to inform the *means* through which management can respond to performance demands via the employee experience (RO1). Those means are by taking these (or similar relevant) indicators as attention points to guide future management practice – as that is where change for the better can be made both *for* the employee and the organisation *via* the employee experience.

With that said, while the validation of the MEO model offers valuable insight into how management can shape employee experience to benefit them and organisation performance, it does not fully address the deeper, individual rationales that influence employees' presence within the organisation. Although a focus on HPMA is evidently important, the employee experience is a holistic phenomenon that extends beyond that which a statistical model can capture within its parameters (Alvesson, 2020; Batat, 2022). Therefore, to explore this further, the next section discusses the forces that can draw employees to organisations, sustain their commitment to it, and/or contribute to their eventual departure.

9.2.2. Why do employees come to, stay at, and leave their organisation? (RQ2)

To explore the underlying factors that influence employees' decisions to work for their current organisation (RO2), this investigation took a neutral and open view of why people might dedicate themselves to an organisation in particular. This research question was posed to enrich understanding of the holistic employee experience for the sake of people and performance (Batat, 2022). Though the employee experience is becoming widely recognised

as being central to the interplay between people and performance in organisation (Itam and Ghosh, 2020), much recent research studying this nexus has only captured narrow aspects of the employee experience in the organisation, such as line-managers or HRM practices. By shifting the focus towards employees' personal rationales for working for their organisation, this investigation identified six key experiential factors that explain why employees come to, stay at, and leave organisations: *constraint*, *convenience*, *concordance*, *contribution*, *consideration*, and *confidence*.

Well-being was understood in this investigation as a pervasive element of employees' experience within their organisation, woven into the very nature of being-there (Dasein). Following Atkinson and Hall's (2011) approach, the findings were interpreted as much as possible from employees' own explanations, and not the explanations of preexisting models. This approach resisted the tendency to impose external definitions of well-being before individuals are given the opportunity to express their own lived experiences. As Batat's (2022) definition of the employee experience suggests, well-being is inseparable from employees' perceptions of work, and thus would holistically influence their decision to come to, stay at, or leave an organisation. The current research concurs, viewing it as core to employee self-movement throughout their career journey.

Of the six themes identified, perhaps the most central to work-related well-being was a person's sense of concordance between their working circumstances and their personality, values, and ambition. While it may not be able to override other factors such as the constraint of wage dependency that force people to work where they otherwise may not, this seemed to be a compelling reason to come to work at a given organisation when felt, and a good reason to leave when not. Core to a sense of self, concordance speaks to the sense of harmony between one's experience of a world and their part in it. From the participative perspective of 'Being-one's-Self' in the world (Heidegger, 1962: 149), this includes a private understanding of who one is in terms of *personality* and *personal values*, and a felt degree of affinity between these intrinsic aspects of selfhood and one's current working circumstances.

Following the narrow psychological interpretation of eudaimonia, Ryan and Deci (2001: 157) and Fisher (2010: 385) restrict the notion of a sense of self-concordance only to 'goals'. This is logical to the extent that eudaimonism refers to 'the actualization of human potentials'

(Ryan and Deci, 2001: 143), ‘regardless of how one may actually feel’ (Fisher, 2010: 385). Yet, people always feel, and what people feel matters to them. For example, as documented in Chapter 7, **Jean** felt “*like the least respected person on the team*” and found that “*infuriating*”, while **Jan** did not “*feel of value*” to themselves; conversely, **Ellis** felt like they can be themselves, and **Jude** felt that they and their organisation were “*a good match*”. And while all of these employees were still in the organisation, both **Jean** and **Jan** vocalised their intention to leave (reported in Chapter 7), while **Ellis** and **Jude** expressed their intention to advance within the company. Therefore, the utility of theorising about their experience of self-concordance devoid of feelings is questionable. The subjective feeling of concordance tells of more than just goal pursuit and achievement.

Concordance certainly also includes the pursuit and achievement of goals in line with personal ambition, as Ryan and Deci (2001) and Fisher (2010) suggest, as this chimes with the idea of future prospects in the organisation, such as opportunities for promotion (Schriesheim and Tsui, 1980). However, the current investigation reveals that people possess this drive to varying degrees – some are already sufficiently fulfilled, so it does not appear as a dominant driver, while others might even be said to be so driven as to be “possessed by it”. This view of concordance unrestrained by prior categorisation provides a richer conceptualisation of its wider influence upon employees’ decisions to come to work for a given organisation.

As documented in Chapter 7 (Section 7.2.2), the personal question section of the interviews elicited a second important personal experience, closely intertwined with a sense of concordance: contribution. As the findings indicate, employees derive significant meaning from seeing their efforts make an impact, whether functionally for the organisation or socially for colleagues, stakeholders, and wider society. For many, it seems this sense of their contribution is integral to a positive sense of self, garnered through work. Moreover, contributing – as an active endeavour – appeared to be not just about oneself, but one’s part in something bigger, some “thing” made possible only through collaboration. Therefore, to add to Itam and Ghosh’s (2020: 41) notion that ‘the feelings, perceptions and emotions that an employee experiences’ provide them with positive reinforcement to contribute to their organisation, it can also be the positive sense of their contribution that provides these positive “internal” experiences, which encourage them to engage and remain within the

organisation 'for good'. Ultimately, a positive sense of contribution can serve to preserve an employee's presence in the organisation, through the way it creates a sense of worthwhileness of intentionally sustaining their place there.

Yet, for even the manager equipped with this enriched understanding of what personally moves their people, the challenge remains in knowing what to do about it – this is an axiological world of "each to their own", inherently subjective and value-driven. With this being the case, what seems clear from the findings is the importance of feeling sufficiently cared about in the organisation. In this way, a received sense of consideration appears to act as an interpersonal force that allows employees to feel seen, valued, and recognised for their contribution.

Prior research reinforces the substantive influence that this relational impression has on employee self-movement. As discovered by De Smet et al. (2021), according to the experience of 5,744 employees, feeling undervalued by their organisation and manager were the two most important reasons for leaving their last job. Further, with their focus on the employee-manager dyad, Ritzenhöfer et al. (2019) found employee perception of their line-manager expressing gratitude, thanks, appreciation, and obligation frequently through verbal and non-verbal actions related to higher satisfaction with their manager and a more positive orientation towards not only said manager, but also the organisation overall, as seen through higher OCB and lower intention to leave. At the broader organisational level, Kim and Park (2019: 1352) similarly found among employees the impression that management showing consideration for individuals cultivated greater trust in colleagues and confidence in the organisation through their collective acquired 'capacities and skills' that lend themselves to 'competitive advantage'. These findings are further supported by those of Rego et al. (2010: 217) and Singh et al. (2018: 90) that show that feeling treated with 'courtesy, consideration, and respect' can act as a powerful force for generating employee confidence in the organisation. Fundamental gestures of consideration can make an organisation seem the better place to be and thus the organisation to keep contributing to.

Yet alas, once again this thesis catches itself looking towards a serene managerial ideal, and not the nuanced reality of organisational life (Alvesson, 2020). To remedy this, it is important to bring back into view the performance management paradox to appropriately prepare management for action. Not always will a manager have the wherewithal to manifest the

best of both worlds for people and performance, as they will be working amid constant change with limited resources and multiple people to appease (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

Added to this complexity is the additional dimension of the constraints employees experience to varying degrees in their wider lives. For many, there is a limited timeframe that they can stay out of employment before they must invest their time, effort, and expertise somewhere. This may not be their dream job (e.g., *Jan*), forcing them instead to be somewhere where they would rather leave. As Hahn and Knight (2021b) suggest, the interplay of constraint and agency means that employees navigate structural limitations in life while still making choices, albeit under circumstances often beyond their ideal preferences. This is ever a source of dissatisfaction and reason to disengage that managers must work with; employees such as these will be there in the organisation, but not particularly willingly.

Where constraints do not bind employees to an organisation, they will move according to their unique situation and how they perceive it. This dynamic presents a challenge for managers, who only have indirect influence over these variables. *Jude's* reflection regarding their former manager, who did all they could to retain them in the company, exemplifies this challenge: despite their admirable efforts, ultimately *Jude's* inconvenience won. As Yadav and Vihari (2023) highlight, along with relevant and engaging work experiences, employees also want convenient ones. When this expectation goes unmet, dissatisfaction can drive employees out of the organisation. As the variables influencing employee's decisions are simultaneous, at times, they can conspire against management to retain colleagues they would rather not see leave.

Nevertheless, managers have a mandate to muster whatever is in their power to optimise the employee experience such that they gain and maintain 'productivity through people' for the telos of organisational excellence (Peters and Waterman, 1982: 248). It is unquestionable that they *ought* to optimise the employee experience for the sake of people, but the findings of this investigation suggest that they must do so also to maximise employee investment in the organisational endeavour. Without this, there will be a workplace well-being deficit that limits the potential gain for the organisation. With this in mind, the discussion now turns to the final research question.

9.2.3. What is essential from management when working through the performance management paradox? (RQ3)

Accepting the potential for management to effectuate positive organisational change through the employee experience, while acknowledging that such change is ultimately governed by employee perception, this investigation sought to leverage that perception to elicit what is essential from management when working through the paradoxical task of ensuring both optimal employee happiness and productivity (RQ3). Recalling the participatory part of the thought-experimental process described in Chapter 4 (Section 4.5.3.3.1), the interviewed employees of the organisation (of whom 36% were managers) were consulted on their views regarding what they saw promoted and prevented these ideal outcomes. These perspectives made it possible to develop an image of essential managerial actions as seen through the employee's mind's eye.

The analysis of the views and experiences of this cohort of colleagues informed a framework of 6 essential managerial actions (to *appreciate, care, talk, involve, orient, and nurture*). To complete the thought experimental process, what now remains to be discussed is how this framework could help management to get closer to the hypothetical paradoxical scenario defined at the start of the process. This scenario was the intentionally quixotic goal of management being able to *maintain optimal conditions for both the people and performance of their organisation, wherein all employees are perfectly satisfied with their jobs, fully engaged with their work, wholeheartedly committed to their organisation, and thus given to performance*. This (still) seemingly 'impossible dream' (Staw, 1986: 40) served as the 'utopian thought' held in mind as a mission for management (Aguinis et al., 2023: 8).

Viewed from the paradox perspective, there is no single managerial trick or technique that can perfect organisational conditions, and so it is important not to view the set of essential managerial actions as a simplistic list of 'best paradoxical practices' (Cunha and Putnam, 2019: 100). As components of a guiding framework, they should be considered instead for how they may be able to help managers hone their practice in the "wilderness" of organisation (Fairhurst, 2019). In keeping with Cunha and Putnam's (2019: 100) perspective, the ACTION framework would be more useful for managerial 'reflection-in-action'. Where over a century of scholarship suggests that there is an insurmountable complexity to

managing people and performance, it can be helpful to recognise and remember what is rudimental in positive human interaction.

The first of these essential actions, to *appreciate*, is to understand the imperfectability of the overall task of management amid the constant torrent of organisational challenges. Appreciation anchors managerial practice to this messiness (Tsoukas, 2017). This awareness of the complexity of the situation that one finds themselves in with others is foundational for finding opportunities to overcome conflict between an organisation's dual duty to its profitability and its people (Glover et al., 2023). While managers cannot always easily fix issues such as human or financial resource scarcity or conflicting perspectives about what *ought* to be done (Smith and Lewis, 2011), progress towards more positive organisational outcomes cannot begin until they first 'confront' and 'embrace' this difficult reality (Waldman et al., 2019: 2).

From this point, the closely related actions of *involving*, *orienting*, and *talking* with others are important means of interaction that could reasonably produce more positive organisational dynamics in the day-to-day (Lewis, 2000). Ameliorating the performance management paradox requires a holistic approach of effective communication, substantive employee investment, and a clear understanding of personal and collective direction. Going by the findings of Kilroy et al. (2023), being the manager that is seen to lead that communication and involvement means being the manager that creates committed citizens of the organisation. By maintaining open and candid dialogue, managers can break down silos and ensure that employees feel heard and valued (de Waal, 2018). Involving employees in both managerial thought processes and important organisational processes can energise them and create a sense that they are being harnessed rather than discounted, which can encourage engagement (Voegtlin, 2011; Van Woerkom and Meyers, 2015). Additionally, providing clear direction helps employees understand how their individual activities align with the broader organisational goals, ensuring that everyone is moving in the same direction. Together, these practices create a collaborative and supportive environment wherein colleagues feel that they can express themselves freely and will hear the truth in return (Brown et al., 2005; Mozumder, 2018). Caution must of course be taken with candid self-expression to minimise the potential for offence. But, if carried out sensitively and sensibly, hard feelings can be processed through constructive conversation to remove the

basis upon which deleterious defensive reactions may form (Lewis and Smith, 2014; Child, 2020). Not only can this improve the flow and effectiveness of information exchange, but it can effectively dissipate stressful experiences in interaction.

A manager will also be more likely to gain the favour and full investment of employees if they interact with them from a position of genuine care and an approach that nurtures their better being. Indeed, the key to ensuring productivity through people, as (Peters and Waterman, 1982: xxii) suggest, may lie in ‘the care, feeding, and unshackling’ of the average person. To *care* and to *nurture* both require an acknowledgement of the human who is the employee. Being dependable and conveying empathy during both personal and professional challenges is difficult to overemphasise. In fact, it is interesting to draw back to Taylor (1919) at this point. Rightly or wrongly, Taylor is not remembered for his compassion in his managerial approach (Kanigel, 2005). Despite this, however, he did not lack an awareness of the essential need for, as he put it, a ‘close, intimate, personal cooperation between the management and the men’ (Taylor, 1919: 26). He saw it that this professional relationship required a persistent disposition of ‘the most friendly help’ from management, as opposed to the extremes of workers being ‘driven or coerced’ by bosses or simply being left to their ‘own unaided devices’ (Taylor, 1919: 26). This encapsulates the essence of a caring and nurturing approach.

Nurturing employees entails a dynamic balance of flexibility and control by offering freedom, guidance, and opportunities for them to manage and develop themselves (Smith and Lewis, 2011). By allowing people to self-manage while supporting this process, managers can enhance productivity and happiness in the long run (Van Woerkom and Meyers, 2015). Actions to this effect can create a workplace where employees feel valued, motivated, and committed, ultimately priming organisational success by mitigating the sense that they are either being stifled with micromanagement or stranded through neglect.

In sum, the thought-experimental element of this investigation has elicited from a cohort of colleagues a simple yet essential set of managerial actions. As paradox in management cannot be fully escaped or resolved (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989; Cunha and Putnam, 2019), it persists as a reality to be worked through daily (Smith and Lewis, 2011). In line with this view, it is accepted that the conditions of organisation are irreducibly complex in practice;

the essential managerial actions for working through that complexity, however, are simple in principle.

This investigation suggests that managers at all levels must ACTION (appreciate, care, talk, involve, orient, and nurture) through all else. These fundamental behaviours, when practiced consistently, provide managers the means to simultaneously serve their organisation's people and performance. Such foundational elements of the employee experience hold deep significance for those who live them in the day-to-day. Further, their simplicity does not undermine their impact; instead, it is precisely their clarity and interpersonal relevance that makes them meaningful for mastering the performance management paradox.

9.3. Conclusion

From its starting point of problematisation, this thesis had a simple mission: to generate insight and provide actionable advice to help managers better cope with – and hopefully even thrive through – paradox (Lewis and Smith, 2014; Pfeffer, 2014). Through its entertainment of a practical problem that entails complexity beyond complete control, it sought to see from the employee experience perspective how managers might still be able to simultaneously benefit their organisation's people and performance.

To conclude this investigation, the following sections present the contributions to management scholarship and practice, the inherent limitations affecting valid and reliable generalisations, and recommendations for future management research and practice. The thesis then closes with a final summary.

9.3.1. Contributions

This investigation offers several contributions to the understanding and application of management, advancing both scholarship and practice. One key contribution is that this investigation appears to be the first of its kind to explicitly integrate the three primary ontological interpretations of paradox theory (the system-inherent, socially constructed, and probabilistic perspectives). This advances management paradox scholarship by providing an

in-depth examination of a real-world, contextualised case of an organisation attempting to thrive amid the contradictory yet interdependent demands of the people who cocreate it (Hahn and Knight, 2021a). This directly answers Cunha and Putnam's (2019) call for more "vibrance" and "polyphony" in the field to prevent it from losing the power of creative theorising and diversity of viewpoints regarding persistent management and organisational challenges. Rather than pitting these 'in-house' perspectives against one another (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011: 254), as others have done (e.g., Putnam et al., 2016; Schad and Bansal, 2018), this investigation adopted a pragmatic approach of theoretical eclecticism (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004), harnessing their differing foci to comprehensively examine the matter.

Additionally, through its mixed methods approach, it adds a valuable contribution to collective understanding of the employee experience. It shows through positive associations between *impressions* of management action and organisational character and *expressions* of HAW the substantive influence of perceived management activity on employees' organisational performance alignment. This offers insight into the ways managerial actions translate into performance outcomes via the subjectivity of employee experience. Further, through its simple line of questioning put to its participants regarding their being in an organisation and their views on optimising both employee happiness and productivity, it offers a balance of nuance and guidance regarding how managers can benefit their organisation by being a source of positive interaction in daily organisational life. For all the complications of organisation – limited resources, change, and subjectivity – perfusing the findings of this investigation is the potential for managers to master paradoxicality through the cumulative quality of their interactions with the workforce. This is their functional and social contribution to their colleagues and organisation.

Moreover, this investigation also diversifies the literature on people and performance management. Although considerable research exists in this area, the integrative review of Chapter 3 suggests that it is heavily dominated by a narrow range of statistical research techniques based upon a single unit of analysis (questionnaire). The mix of methods, depth, and detail provided in this investigation enhances the research domain by examining management practice through multiple, complementary research approaches (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). A notable example of the power of mixed methods in the current

investigation is the revalidation of Chun's (2005) VEC scale (Chapter 6). Where Martin (2021) appears to have encountered the same (or similar) issue in their PLS-SEM study of organisational character, with only questionnaire data to hand, their PCA yielded a two-component solution that was at odds with Chun's (2005; 2017) findings that integrity was the most important organisational character according to employees. Martin's (2021) study found instead that courage and empathy were the most important factors. Faced with this discrepancy, and with access to rich interview data, in the current investigation a model of POC was constructed through the words of the people freely expressing why they work where they do, what brings them satisfaction in work, and their ideas on managerial ideals. This led to the interesting distinction between relational and aspirational organisational characteristics and novel insight suggesting the significance of the former over the latter in the link between management, employees, and performance.

Further, through its open and neutral approach to drawing on the employee experience, this investigation has provided an empirical example that challenges the utility of segregating well-being and happiness and creating rigid divisions that seem to distance research from the way that well-being is experienced. Rather than taking forward Batat's (2022: 1000) 'pillars' of well-being, which stand upon narrow and unsound foundations (as problematised in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2), this investigation took the view that well-being, as is denoted by the term itself, is experienced as a holistic sense of all being well – a phenomenon tantamount to happiness. It arguably need not be complicated any more than that to learn what people need to flourish in the organisation, and for the organisation to flourish through this. Well-being is holistic in the employee experience, because employees – by their very *Dasein* – are always immersed in being themselves and acting according to that felt experience (Heidegger, 1962).

By naively enquiring with people as to why they were there in the organisation, this investigation found that within the bounds of life's constraints, people more willingly come to work where it is suitably convenient, but also where they feel a sense of concordance with their working circumstances and value in their contribution. Beyond these feelings of ease, affinity, and worthwhileness, people also come to work where they feel considered by their colleagues and organisation (De Smet et al., 2021; Batat, 2022). Conversely, when employees feel inconvenienced, that they are contributing their time, effort, and expertise

to the wrong company, and/or are fundamentally underappreciated, they look to move on all the sooner.

This suggests that a sense of consideration is a powerful force that managers can (or indeed *do*) influence – not completely, but substantially. As the paradox perspective shows, there are always factors beyond managerial control, but that does not negate the positive (and negative) influence that managers throughout the ranks have through the variables that they can control: their actions. As the SEM findings suggest, the extent to which management can work consistently and dynamically with colleagues amid the pressure and indeterminacy of organisational life, the happier those employees will be to put the work in today and return time and again for more of the same.

However, even with this extent of employee experience insight, this investigation nevertheless maintains that *how* managers can truly master the paradox of performance management is only to be told in practice – the means are determined in situ and in *actu*. No academic inquiry can go beyond its humble evidence-based suggestions to guide that practice. (And “practice” it is, as it will always be an imperfectible task at which managers can improve with intention.)

The contribution of this investigation to that potential for mastery is the ACTION framework. To handle the complexity of organisation, management must ‘keep things very simple indeed’ (Peters and Waterman, 1982: 56). Yet, as Pfeffer (2014: 461) suggests, there can be a tendency for management scholarship to lack the simplicity and memorability that make for fundamentally ‘actionable advice’. Therefore, drawn from the experiences of a cohort of colleagues, the ACTION framework for working through paradox is put forth as a simple set of tenets, an *aide-mémoire* for when managers reflect on their action.

Future research is warranted to explore the utility of this framework beyond its current theoretical proposition, but it could be beneficial being brought to mind in the classroom, meeting room, and boardroom, for students, practitioners, and directors of management to incorporate into their own practice. The hope is that such reflection-upon-action can prime mindful managers to be there for colleagues in ways that promote an overall more positive working experience.

Finally, a potential contribution to both management scholarship and practice is the use of IPMA in the field of people and performance management. In either context, IPMA allows for detailed insights that provide managers a rank order of foci in terms of their impact on a target construct (Hair et al., 2018). While academics may be mostly interested in the relative importance of indicators, practitioners could examine them in light of their (or their organisation's) performance. Combined with an understanding of the feasibility of improving specific variables and the projected relative gain potential, IPMA could serve as a versatile tool to enable managers to hone their practice according to experiential data. In this investigation, the variables were management action, organisational character, and combined work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction. But other investigations in academia or practice could examine other variables of interest in the way that they are hypothesised to relate.

9.3.2. Limitations

In any investigation it is important to be mindful of limitations. This investigation possesses several that should be considered when interpreting its findings and when designing future research projects. The first is its single case-design. As Yin (2014) notes, theoretical generalisations that extend beyond the narrow empirical scope of the examined case should be regarded as reasoned theoretical projections rather than direct empirical conclusions.

A substantive reason why Solet was selected as the case organisation to draw on for the purposes of this thought experiment is that it is distinctly *not* what Siggelkow (2007: 20) would call a case of a '*talking pig*' – a truly *extraordinary* phenomenon. What this means to say is that Solet outwardly presents itself as a rather ordinary example of what a modern organisation ought to be: great at what it does, and good to its people while it does it. Solet's presentation of its integrity and empathy enmeshed with its commercial zeal and conscientiousness is rather standard business practice (Chun, 2005; Bowen, 2018), and by no means a guarantee of fulfilment. As Solet represents, therefore, *not* a unique or peculiar specimen (i.e., a talking pig) in implying its steadfast determination to be the best at what it does for every stakeholder, it provides a relatable context from which to build a theoretical pathway from its organisational reality towards management mastery according to the lived

experiences of its people. However, while Solet's positioning as a relatively typical modern organisation lends credibility to the applicability of its insights, the limitations of single-case research must still be considered. The absence of comparative cases means that the extent to which these findings generalise across varied organisational contexts remains an open question that warrants further scientific scrutiny.

A second design limitation is the lack of reverse coded items in the questionnaire battery. This occurred in the current investigation as a result of a decision to maintain the original wording in the validation studies from which the scales were drawn (Chun, 2005; de Waal, 2012b; Salas-Vallina and Alegre, 2021). However, this restricted the ability to clearly identify respondent disengagement (as deliberated in Chapter 6, Section 6.1), which could impact the overall quality of quantitative data upon which inferences were formed. In hindsight, it would have been wise to adapt these questionnaires to possess some reverse-coded items that could be used as indicators of non-genuine response patterns. As an example, in Salas-Vallina and Alegre's (2021) S-HAW scale, one or two of the organisational commitment items could have been reverted to Allen and Meyer's (1990: 6) original wording: '*I do not feel emotionally attached to this organisation*' and '*I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organisation*'. Beyond reverse-coded items (as these are not foolproof), the current investigation may also have benefited from additional attention checks, such as brief, unrelated or instruction-sensitive questions to flag respondent inattentiveness (Kung et al., 2018). These could have provided an additional layer of robustness for ensuring quantitative data integrity.

A third limitation of this investigation is its relatively small sample size, principally for the questionnaire-based survey of employees. Although a particular strength of the PLS approach to SEM is its workability with a modest number of observations (Hair et al., 2022), and the inverse square root method of determining sample power confirmed the sample was sufficient to reliably detect the significant associations (Kock and Hadaya, 2018), nevertheless there remains the question of the representativeness of these employees' experiences of their organisation to their non-respondent colleagues and beyond.

Relatedly, it is important to acknowledge the fact that the participants in the investigation may have been a self-selecting sample (de Waal, 2018), there, as a cohort, shining a disproportionately positive light upon their current organisation to represent the views of all

their colleagues. The negative skew of the data distribution (Chapter 6, Section 6.1) suggests that this is a possibility. However, to resolve this concern, negative experiences have also been emphasised in the analysis, which provide integral insight for theoretical development into the variety and influence of employee experiences in a single organisation. In some instances, these negative experiences have been voiced in retrospect by now happier employees (e.g., *Val*), which suggests that, within a single organisation, management can have a substantive effect on employees' experiences for the better. Further, a self-selecting sample of employees whose experiences may indeed be nonrepresentative of every employee's experience is not a problem for the claim that management can learn from this in-depth examination of the meaningful impact and material challenge of optimising the employee experience.

Finally, while the current investigation adopted a distinctly egological lens, centred on the immersed, felt experience of being an employee, it is important to acknowledge the wider array of literatures that also seek to understand the employee experience from different vantage points. These include research at the intersection of HRM and well-being, organisational psychological studies of the human psyche, and investigations into human motivation, each of which address inextricable facets of how individuals experience work, organisation, and management. Critical perspectives further enrich this terrain by illuminating the darker dimensions of employment that employees can and often do experience. To extrapolate the mixed methodological principle of ' $1 + 1 = 3$ ' (Fetters and Freshwater, 2015: 116), introduced in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3), these differing research perspectives can contribute to a richer comprehension of the employee experience through their diversity and combination. As Morgan (2017: 7) suggests, it is vital to study the employee experience through 'the eyes of the employee' and 'the eyes of the organization', as it is created and affected by what both see. The findings from the current investigation – which sought to see a world of work through the eyes of the employee – invite dialogue with various alternative perspectives of this complex and multifaceted phenomenon to advance how it is theorised, contextualised, and managed.

9.3.3. Recommendations

In considering the implications of this investigation, a key takeaway emerges regarding how its findings should be examined in future research. This investigation explored the phenomenon of the employee experience through a lens that focused dominantly on the “raw” egological perspective of being an employee. This approach was taken to attempt to theorise as closely as possible to the human experience of *Dasein* in the organisation. However, as a universal limitation of every inquiry, it must be accepted that such efforts to see the world as others do are ever curtailed by the double hermeneutic problem (Giddens, 1987). This means that there is always cause to exercise “the duty of doubt” that this was achieved (Haldane, 1928). As Eakin and Gladstone (2020: 4) suggest, it would be better to accept the ‘creative presence’ of the researcher in the research. Total immersion in the research participants’ perspective – *epoché* or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) – by relinquishing ‘preconceived perceptions, assumptions, and biases about a phenomenon’ was an ideal to aim towards (Urcia, 2021: 4), caveated only by the impossibility and absurdity of the endeavour (Gadamer, 1975). In this light, the findings can be viewed as having been socially constructed through the interaction of researcher and participant. Accordingly, it is recommended that the elements that have been “constructed” through this investigation, namely the model of employee self-movement and management ACTION framework, warrant further verification in additional research contexts.

This could be approached through quantitative research, such as PLS-SEM, or further comparative case studies akin to de Waal’s (2017) work on the HPO framework. For example, exploratory modelling could assess the relative weights of a sense of concordance, contribution, convenience, and consideration upon people and performance-related outcomes (e.g., OCB), along with potential moderating and mediating relationships. Alternatively, a comparative case study may be able to shine further light on how management may become better poised to successfully deal with the constraints employees universally experience differently. By studying a range of contexts (e.g., warehouse, office, and peripatetic) across industries, more may become known about universals of management applicable in a diversity of scenarios (Aguinis et al., 2012).

Further research to explore the ACTION framework could include the development of a scale to gather a quantifiable measure of related potential attention points for management. To

improve on the approach taken in this investigation, this research could have a greater impact by attempting to incorporate a more direct measure of performance. While performance itself is difficult to ascertain, studies that use supervisor-rated performance may have a closer measure (though there is the issue of the managers' subjectivity). Alternatively, the ACTION framework could be trialled within an intervention study, perhaps embedded within a broader "qualimetric" analysis integrating quantitative, financial, and qualitative insights (Savall and Zardet, 2011). This could include a management IPMA on an employee experience-related outcome variable (e.g., HAW) or performance-related variable to identify potential hidden costs due to low(er) scores, followed by the design and implementation of a strategy to improve scores, and a post-intervention review of strategy efficacy. To enrich the insights, such an investigation could also draw on diary records by the participating managers, notes from the review, and perspectives of directors and employees pertaining to the intervention, notable changes, and persisting problems. This could channel 'the spirit of ethnography' (Zickar and Carter, 2010: 304) to make up for the distance that so often exists between management practice and scholarship (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) by constructing a much-needed "pracademic" bridge between management theory and practice.

A final recommendation is that managers throughout organisations should embrace a holistic employee experience orientation, integrating this into both their systematic and dynamic organisational activities. This very project stands as proof of concept that the employee experience is as influential as it is insightful, and within which lies a gain and loss potential for organisations. Sense-check with the workforce. Harness them as "internal consultants". They have much to say that matters to the organisation, in no small part because it is meaningful to them. Practitioner participation in the abovementioned "pracademic" investigations would also help hone this practice by creating academically guided data and experimentation.

9.4. Closing words

This investigation comprised an in-depth case study of management by taking a snapshot of the working lives of a company of colleagues while they cocreate a thriving business. It found that while a focus on results is necessary for management to have (de Waal, 2012a), superseding that in importance is *how* managers throughout the ranks work with their people to produce them. It found the power of perception to be the governor of the relationship between management action and employee reaction, and it concludes that there are ever variables at play that will conspire to send the boulder rolling back down the hill; management is an interminable task, after all.

In true paradox fashion, this investigation recommends accepting that fate, but not fatalistically. There are things that each and every manager can do in the day-to-day – in the day *today* – to work through paradox in practice: these are tenets of reflective-corrective action that, when used as consistently as paradox is persistent, may just about eek out that extra ounce of employee investment for the way the action itself promotes a more positive employee experience. To bring this investigation to its final thought, in line with its guiding principle that the employee experience is a font of managerial insight, it seems fitting to leave the last word to one of its invaluable internal consultants, **Jude**, who parted with the following simple yet sage management mantra:

Look after your people and they will look after your business.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Systematically searched literature review table

Study	Design	Employee perception	Outcome for employee	Outcome for organisation
Akhtar et al. (2020)	Quantitative; multi-wave survey of 171 banking sector employees in Pakistan.	Positive perception of manager's behaviour regarding <i>inclusion</i> (involving all relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes); <i>deliberation</i> (facilitating open and rational discussion); <i>accountability</i> (explaining and justifying decisions); <i>responsiveness</i> (considering and responding to the needs/expectations of others); a <i>balanced stakeholder orientation</i> (considering the interests of various groups).	Greater: Sense of fit in organisation; Sense of trust in leader.	Greater: Intention to report wrongdoing.
Ambrose et al. (2021)	Quantitative; <i>Study 1</i> : survey of 578 employees and 134 supervisors in multiple organisations and sectors; <i>Study 2</i> : survey of 904 employees and 196 supervisors (both studies in the USA).	Perception that one receives fair, respectful, and dignified treatment from one's organisation.	Greater: Sense of fair coworker behaviour.	Greater: (supervisor-rated) Workgroup cooperation; Workgroup OCB; Workgroup performance. Less: (supervisor-rated) Workgroup deviance.
Atkinson and Hall (2011)	Qualitative; semi-structured interviews with 43 NHS employees in the UK.	Perception that management permits flexible working.	Greater: Happiness.	Greater: (perceived) Employee performance; Recruitment; Retention. Less: (perceived) Absence.

Study	Design	Employee perception	Outcome for employee	Outcome for organisation
Huang and He (2022)	Quantitative; survey of 417 employees from a large high-tech company in China.	Positive perception of HRM practices regarding <i>staffing</i> (e.g., effort to select the right candidate); <i>training</i> (e.g., formal training programmes to increase employee promotability within the organisation); <i>internal mobility</i> (e.g., opportunities for upward progression); <i>results-oriented appraisal</i> (e.g., measuring performance by objective, quantifiable results); and <i>incentive rewards</i> (e.g., accurate pay for individual/group performance).	Greater: Perceived insider status.	Greater: (self-reported) OCB.
Javed et al. (2019)	Quantitative; survey of 180 employees matched to their line-managers in the textile industry in Pakistan.	Perception of line-manager's <i>openness</i> (being open to hearing new ideas, attentive to new opportunities to improve work processes, and open to discuss the desired goals and new ways to achieve them); <i>availability</i> (being available for consultation on problems, an ongoing 'presence' in this team—someone who is readily available, and available for professional questions); and <i>accessibility</i> (being ready to listen to requests and accessible for discussing emerging problems, and by encouraging one to access them on emerging issues).	Greater: Psychological safety (sense of safety, ease, support, and interpersonal acceptance).	Greater: (supervisor-rated) Innovative behaviour.
Jo et al. (2020)	Quantitative; survey of 530 customer service employees matched to supervisors in 72 departments of 15 hotels in South Korea.	Positive perception of service-oriented <i>high-performance work systems</i> regarding staffing, training, involvement/participation, performance appraisals, compensation/rewards, and caring. Also, perception of <i>unit service leadership</i> (e.g., supervisor recognition and appreciation of high-quality work and service).	Greater: Psychological health; Sense of thriving (vitality and learning).	Greater: (supervisor-rated) Service performance.

Study	Design	Employee perception	Outcome for employee	Outcome for organisation
Kaltiainen and Hakanen (2022)	Quantitative; 18-month two-wave survey of 2453 workers of various public sector organisations in Finland.	Perception that one's manager encourages use of talents, keeps themselves in the background and credits others, expects accountability, takes risks even when uncertain of the support from their own manager, shows their true feelings to their staff, tries to learn from criticism, emphasizes the importance of focusing on the good of the whole, and does not hold grudges.	Less: Burnout.	Greater: (self-reported) Adaptive performance; Task performance; Work engagement.
Katou (2022)	Quantitative; survey of 1,112 employees working at 158 organisations in Greece.	Positive perception of <i>high-performance work systems</i> in terms of staffing, training and development, compensation, performance appraisal, participation and communication.	Greater: Well-being. Less: Sense of exploitation.	Greater: (self-reported) Motivation; OCB; Organisational commitment; Perceived organisational performance; (effectiveness, efficiency, innovation, quality); Work engagement.
Kilroy et al. (2023)	Quantitative; survey of 613 front-line workers reporting to 50 front-line managers in two manufacturing plants of a single organisation in Mexico and Ireland.	Positive perception of the extent that front-line manager enacts HR policies (policy enactment), leads communication and involvement (leadership behaviour), and provides developmental support (coaching behaviour).	Greater: Sense of organisational and supervisor support.	Greater: (self-reported) OCB; Organisational commitment.

Study	Design	Employee perception	Outcome for employee	Outcome for organisation
Kim and Park (2019)	Quantitative; survey of 208 responses from employees in a manufacturing organisation in South Korea.	Perception of organisational-level management in terms of excellent role modelling, providing clear communication of expectations and purposes, stimulating intelligence and rationality, and showing consideration for individuals.	Greater: Interpersonal colleague trust.	Greater: (self-reported) OCB; Perceived organisational learning.
Lee et al. (2018)	Quantitative; survey of 242 marketing managers in Italy.	Perception that employees and top management assume accountability, accept responsibility, communicate openly about ethical issues and actions, reward ethical decisions, and help society.	Greater: Job satisfaction; Quality of work life.	Greater: Esprit de corps (team spirit); Organisational commitment.
Medina-Garrido et al. (2021)	Quantitative; survey of 1511 banking employees in Spain.	Perception of work-family policy in terms of <i>existence</i> (e.g., having the schedule flexibility to manage personal and family responsibilities) and <i>accessibility</i> (e.g., having a supportive supervisor and colleagues and the absence of consequences for career advancement).	Greater: Job satisfaction. Less: Nervousness; Stress.	Greater: (self-reported) Motivation; Organisational commitment; Performance.
Mohammad et al. (2019)	Quantitative; survey 150 employees in financial institutions in Malaysia.	Perception of organisational justice (distributive, procedural, and interactive) and an overall perception of fair, respectful, and dignified treatment.	Greater: Psychological ownership (possession/control); Sense of fairness.	Greater: (self-reported) OCB.

Study	Design	Employee perception	Outcome for employee	Outcome for organisation
Mozumder (2018)	Quantitative; survey of 284 employees in three local councils in England.	Perception that managers listen, discipline appropriately, set a moral example and behave overall ethically, have employees' best interests in mind, make fair and balanced decisions and consider what is "right", discuss business ethics or values with employees, and define success not only by results but also how they are obtained.	Greater: Job satisfaction; Sense of trust in managers; Well-being.	Greater: (employee perceived) Group OCB; Organisational performance.
Mroueh and de Waal (2020)	Quantitative; 107 survey responses and interviews with workers of a Takaful organisation in the UAE.	Positive perception of high-performance organisation through actions that convey <i>management quality</i> (e.g., management applies strong leadership); <i>openness and action orientation</i> (e.g., management frequently engages in a dialogue with organisational members); <i>long-term orientation</i> (e.g., the organisation is a secure workplace for organisational members); <i>continuous improvement and renewal</i> (e.g., in the organisation process are continuously improved); and <i>employee quality</i> (e.g., management inspires organisational members to achieve extraordinary results).	Greater: Job satisfaction.	Greater: Organisational attractiveness; Organisational commitment; Work engagement.

Study	Design	Employee perception	Outcome for employee	Outcome for organisation
Rego et al. (2010)	Quantitative; survey of 216 employees from 14 organisations (with workforces ranging from 11 to 270 employees) in several industries (plastics, molds, glass, plaster, rubber, etc.) in Portugal.	Perception that in the organisation "we" are dedicated to doing good in addition to doing well; people are treated with courtesy, consideration, and respect; trust is placed in colleagues and leadership; consistent compassionate, concerned, and caring acts are carried out; mistakes/missteps are forgiven and used for learning; actions culminate in a sense of integrity, honour, honesty, and trustworthiness.	Greater: Well-being.	Greater: (supervisor-rated) OCB (overall, altruism, and sportsmanship).
Ritzenhöfer et al. (2019)	Quantitative; (study 2 of paper) time-lagged survey of 294 participants recruited from private and public networks in an undisclosed location(s).	Perception of manager being grateful, thankful, appreciative, and obliged through the frequency of their verbal and non-verbal actions.	Greater: Satisfaction with leader.	Greater: (self-reported) OCB (towards leader and organisation).
Salas-Vallina et al. (2020)	Quantitative; survey of 783 workers in banking in Spain and Italy.	Positive perception of branch-level <i>high-involvement work systems</i> pertaining to flexible job design, information-sharing, team problem-solving, team self-directedness, sharing of gains, and training.	Greater: Job satisfaction.	Less: Intention to leave leader and organisation. Greater: (self-reported) Organisational commitment; Perceived absorptive capacity (branch level); Work engagement.

Study	Design	Employee perception	Outcome for employee	Outcome for organisation
Salas-Vallina et al. (2023)	Quantitative; survey of 499 physicians working in specialised medical units in undisclosed location(s).	Positive perception of HRM practices pertaining to personal opportunities for development, participation in decision-making, and communication.	Greater: Sense of resilience. Less: Burnout; Sense of demands.	Greater: (self-reported) Quality of patient care.
Samad et al. (2022)	Quantitative; survey of 280 university academic staff members in Australia.	Perception of immediate supervisor in terms of excellent role modelling, providing clear communication of expectations and purposes, stimulating intelligence and rationality, and showing consideration for individuals.	Greater: Job satisfaction; Well-being.	Less: Turnover intention.
Sani et al. (2023)	Qualitative; semi-structured interviews with 28 services industry employees in the UK.	Positive perception of in-person human contact during the onboarding process.	Greater: Meaningfulness in work; Sense of social connectedness; Well-being.	Greater: Perceived employee relations.
Schaufeli (2015)	Quantitative; survey of 1213 workers in various sectors in the Netherlands (e.g., health/welfare, commercial services, retail/repair).	Perception of managerial acts which <i>inspire</i> (e.g., enthusing others for their plans), <i>strengthen</i> (e.g., delegating tasks and responsibilities), and <i>connect</i> (e.g., encouraging team members to cooperate).	Greater: Sense of resources. Less: Burnout; Sense of demands.	Greater: (self-reported) Employability; Organisational commitment; Performance; Work engagement.

Study	Design	Employee perception	Outcome for employee	Outcome for organisation
Shao et al. (2023)	Quantitative; (study 3) survey of 224 nurses, midwives, and personal care workers in Australia.	Positive perception of anti-violence HRM regarding management of violent incidents, anti-violence training, and environmental security.	Greater: Positive emotions. Less: Negative emotions.	Greater: Career commitment. Less: Turnover intention.
Singh et al. (2018)	Quantitative; survey of 136 knowledge workers across five service sectors (banking, software, academia, pharmaceutical, and consultancy) in India.	Perception that in the organisation "we" are dedicated to doing good in addition to doing well; people are treated with courtesy, consideration, and respect; trust is placed in colleagues and leadership; consistent compassionate, concerned, and caring acts are carried out; mistakes/missteps are forgiven and used for learning; actions culminate in a sense of integrity, honour, honesty, and trustworthiness.	Greater: Happiness.	Greater: Work engagement.
Stempel et al. (2022)	Quantitative; survey of 258 people reporting working 30 or more hours per week in Germany.	Perception that supervisor demonstrates good role modelling for work and nonwork balance, effective behaviours in how to juggle work and nonwork balance, and how a person can jointly be successful on and off the job.	Less: Work-family conflict.	Greater: (self-reported) Performance.
Van Woerkom and Meyers (2015)	Quantitative; survey of 442 respondents in 39 departments of 8 organisations in Netherlands and Belgium.	Perception of strength-based HRM practices (i.e., appreciating and providing opportunities to identify, develop, and use strengths) in the organisation and supervisor support.	Greater: Positive affect (interest and excitement).	Greater: (self-reported) Innovativeness; In-role performance (achievement, competence, proficiency); OCB.

Study	Design	Employee perception	Outcome for employee	Outcome for organisation
Walumbwa et al. (2008)	Quantitative; (studies 2 and 3 of paper) survey-based, multi-study, multi-sample, time-lagged design in the USA.	<i>Authentic leadership:</i> Perception that one's supervisor's actions are consistent with self-awareness (e.g., seeking and internalising feedback), relational transparency (e.g., admitting mistakes and saying what one means), morality (e.g., beliefs congruent with actions), and balanced processing (e.g., soliciting and considering multiple viewpoints). <i>Benevolence climate:</i> Perception that in the company the major consideration is what is best for everyone, the most important concern is the good of all the people, "our" major concern is always what is best for the other person, people look out for each other's good, and it is expected that you will always do what is right for the customers and public. <i>Ethical leadership:</i> as shown in Mozumder (2018). <i>Transformational leadership:</i> as shown in Samad et al. (2019).	<i>Authentic, ethical, and transformational leadership:</i> Greater: Satisfaction with leader. <i>Authentic leadership and benevolence climate:</i> Greater: Job satisfaction.	<i>Authentic, ethical, and transformational leadership:</i> Greater: (self-reported) OCB. Organisational commitment. <i>Authentic leadership and benevolence climate:</i> Greater: (supervisor-rated) Job performance.

Study	Design	Employee perception	Outcome for employee	Outcome for organisation
Yang and Wei (2017)	Quantitative; survey of 239 employees and 62 immediate line-managers in an insurance firm in China.	Perception that line-manager listens, disciplines appropriately, sets a moral example and behaves overall ethically, has employees' best interests in mind, makes fair and balanced decisions and considers what is "right", and discusses business ethics or values with employees.	Greater: Sense of organisational identity.	Greater: (supervisor-rated) Task performance.
Zhou et al. (2023)	Quantitative; multi-wave, multi-source survey of 235 employees and their direct supervisors in China.	Positive perceived extent of (<i>high-performance work systems/practices</i> being offered regarding personal development, fairness, consideration, autonomy, and clarity. Also, positive perceived extent to which one's leader is attentive to time-management (e.g., reminding members of important deadlines or prioritising and allocating time to tasks)	Greater: Sense of thriving (vitality and learning).	Greater: (supervisor-rated) Work-related creativity.

Appendix B. Qualtrics questionnaire content

Title Page Content:

 **Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

Welcome to the survey for the Ph.D. research project titled:

Probit for people and performance: in search of the eudaimonic organisation to escape the happy/productive worker paradox.

The survey begins by asking you several questions about you and your role in your organisation. After this, there are three randomised sections of questions designed to be answered according to your personal experience; there can be no right or wrong answers to these, so please respond to all questions with your honest view. The final page contains a section where you can add any comments or questions if you wish. Overall, the survey should take around 10 minutes to complete.

All identifiable information in this questionnaire is collected for the purpose of reliable data processing only. It will be handled confidentially by the MMU research team and systematically anonymised at the earliest opportunity.

As the theme of this research involves well-being and ethics, on the final page you will be asked how long it took you to complete the survey. The reason for this is so that the Principal Investigator (Sam) can employ the "pay it forward" principle to volunteer for the duration that you have given to this project. This means that the well-being of others will be helped as a "thank you" to you and "thanks to you".

By submitting this survey, you consent to be a part of this study for the purposes outlined in the **Participant Information Sheet** below. Please email samuel.boyce@stu.mmu.ac.uk if you have not been able to access the information or have any queries.

[Participant Information Sheet](#)

Please proceed by clicking the arrow.



(The '[Participant Information Sheet](#)' was an embedded link to a PDF)

Questionnaire page 1 content:

This section seeks to gather descriptive information about respondents for data analysis purposes. All identifiable information will be anonymised and held only for as long as necessary.

Name

First Name

Surname

Age (years)

(range 18-100)

Gender

(Female; Male; Non-binary / third gender; Prefer not to say)

How long have you worked for your organisation?

Year(s)

Month(s)

How long have you
worked for your
organisation?

Are you currently undergoing probationary (introductory) training?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Do you currently work full-time or part-time for your organisation?

☐ Full-time

☐ Part-time

Questionnaire pages 2, 3, and 4 content:

(The following three questionnaire pages appear in random order to the participant, and the questions are also randomised within their respective (sub)sections.)

de Waal's high-performance organisation (HPO) scale (used in de Waal, 2018 and Mroueh and de Waal, 2020)

Component	Question and items
	As an organisational member, considering the following statements regarding management, please rate on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree) the extent to which you think each is the case in your organisation.
Management quality	Management is trusted by organisational members
	Management has integrity
	Management is a role model for organisational members
	Management applies fast decision making
	Management applies fast action taking
	Management coaches organisational members to achieve better results
	Management focusses on achieving results
	Management is very effective
	Management applies strong leadership
	Management is confident
	Management always holds organisational members responsible for their results
	Management is decisive with regard to non-performers
Openness and action orientation	Management frequently engages in a dialogue with employees
	Organisational members spend much time on dialogue, knowledge exchange and learning
	Organisational members are always involved in important processes
	Management allows making mistakes
	Management welcomes change
	The organisation is performance driven
Long-term orientation	The organisation maintains good and long-term relationships with all stakeholders
	The organisation is aimed at servicing the customers as best as possible
	Management has been with the company for a long time
	New management is promoted from within the organisation
	The organisation is a secure workplace for organisational members
Continuous improvement and renewal	The organisation has adopted a strategy that sets it clearly apart from other organisations
	In the organisation processes are continuously improved
	In the organisation processes are continuously simplified
	In the organisation processes are continuously aligned
	In the organisation everything that matters to performance is explicitly reported
	In the organisation both financial and non-financial information is reported to

Quality of employees	organisational members
	The organisation continuously innovates its core competencies
	The organisation continuously innovates its products, processes and services
	Management inspires organisational members to accomplish extraordinary results
	The resilience and flexibility of organisational members is continuously strengthened
	The organisation has a diverse and complementary workforce
	The organisation grows through partnerships with suppliers and/or customers

Chun's (2005) Organisational Virtue Ethical Character Scale

Component	Question and items
	Imagining your organisation as a person, please rate on scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) the extent to which you feel the following words describe your organisation's character.
Integrity	Honest
	Sincere
	Socially-responsible
	Trustworthy
Empathy	Concerned
	Reassuring
	Supportive
	Sympathetic
Courage	Ambitious
	Achievement-oriented
	Leading
	Competent
Warmth	Friendly
	Open
	Pleasant
	Straightforward
Zeal	Exciting
	Innovative
	Imaginative
	Spirited
Conscientiousness	Reliable
	Hardworking
	Proud
	Secure

Salas-Vallina and Alegre's (2021) short happiness at work scale

Component	Question and items
	Considering your happiness at work, on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always) please rate the extent to which you feel the following...
<i>Vigour</i>	At my job I feel strong and vigorous
<i>Dedication</i>	I am enthusiastic about my job
<i>Absorption</i>	I get carried away when I am working
	Considering your happiness at work, on a scale of 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) please rate the extent to which you feel the following...
<i>Job satisfaction</i>	I am satisfied with the work I do
	I am satisfied with the pay I receive for my job
	I am satisfied with the opportunities which exist in this organisation for advancement (promotion)
	Considering your happiness at work, on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) please rate the extent to which you feel the following...
<i>Affective organisational commitment</i>	I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation
	I feel 'emotionally attached' to this organisation
	I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organisation

Questionnaire final page content:

Please indicate at what 'level' your role officially involves you being a line-manager, according to the options below (please select the **highest** 'level' that applies to you; more than one option may read true).

I am not a line-manager (nobody directly reports to me)

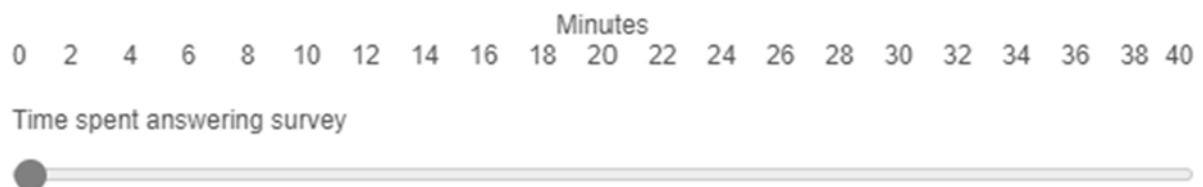
Level 1 line-manager (at least one 'non-manager' directly reports to me)

Level 2 line-manager (at least one 'Level 1' manager directly reports to me)

Level 3 line-manager, or above (at least one 'Level 2' manager, or above, directly reports to me)

This is the end of the survey, so it is time to 'pay it forward':

Thank you for your time. If you would like the Principal Investigator (Sam) to volunteer for the time that you spent on the survey, then please indicate how long you spent completing it:



	Yes/No	If yes, please provide your email
	Yes No	Email
Interested in a short research interview?	☐ ☐	▲ ▼ ◀ ▶

Participant Information Sheet

End of survey page:

 **Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.

Participant Information Sheet

Probity for people and performance: in search of the eudaimonic organisation to escape the happy/productive worker paradox

Invitation to research

My name is Samuel Boyce, I am a PhD researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University. I invite you to participate in this self-funded project which cares to find optimal (practical and ethical) conditions for happiness and productivity at work.

Your participation in this research is voluntary and any information you provide will be treated confidentially and anonymised. Your employer will not have access to your response – they will not even know that you have contributed.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited to participate because you are a member of the [Solet] Family. Participation is open to every organisational member.

There are two possible parts of this study in which you can take part: a questionnaire and a research interview.

Studies like this one intend to capture a 'representative sample'. As this investigation is a case study of your overall organisation, for the questionnaire, this means participant numbers within the **hundreds** are best for strong analyses. Of course, in an ideal world, 100% participation would be the aim, but as many of you as possible is the realistic goal.

For the interviews, a 'representative sample' is defined more so by the variety of voices in the results. I would hope to speak to a variety of members of your organisation which best represents *you* (all together) and *it*. The objective will be to speak with as many of you as necessary to develop knowledge from a collective of your perspectives that can support the aim of optimising happiness and productivity in your organisation. Of course, this depends on volunteers, but the goal will be to speak with **tens** of you.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary.

If you were to take part and then change your mind, you may withdraw your consent to be a part of the study at any point without giving a reason.

You can ask to have your data deleted at any time, but it might not always be possible. If you ask to have your information deleted before 01/01/2023, it will be done. If you ask to have it deleted after this point, it may not be possible. Once your data is anonymised, it is not possible to withdraw it, because it cannot be known which data is yours.

If you have participated but have changed your mind about being part of the study, please contact **Samuel.Boyce@stu.mmu.ac.uk** to request to be withdrawn.

What will I be asked to do?

There are two parts to this project in which you may freely take part.

There is a **questionnaire**, which can be accessed via the link in the body of the email to which this participant information sheet is attached (please contact **Samuel.Boyce@stu.mmu.ac.uk** if you have any trouble accessing the link).

Also, if you would like, you can take part in a short research **interview** (via MS Teams). Please contact Sam via the email above or indicate at the end of your questionnaire if you are interested (there's a question for it).

The questionnaire asks you about your organisation and your happiness at work. It should take around 10 minutes to complete. The questionnaire data will be statistically analysed to explore the nature of the relationships between your experience, and happiness, at work.

The interview is a 'semi-structured' confidential conversation between you and an interviewer (Sam). It has a short set of open, guiding questions to explore your valued experience of work, happiness, and productivity. They are quite short (about 20 mins), but if you wanted to talk for longer, you are very welcome to. The 'semi-structured' nature of the conversation allows us to explore around the topics as we talk about them. You can also ask your own questions at any stage. The audio of the interviews is recorded so that I can transcribe what is expressed for analysis. So that you may speak freely, all identifying information will be confidential and anonymous.

Are there any risks if I participate?

Due to the utmost care that will be taken with your personal information and the nature of this investigation, there are no foreseeable risks of participation.

The questionnaire is hosted in a software approved by Manchester Metropolitan University for its use. Manchester Metropolitan University is the controller of the data. The Principal Investigator (Sam) will handle the data in the survey software and other secure data analysis packages approved by Manchester Metropolitan University. No-one in your organisation will have access to any personal/identifying data collected for this investigation. The data can only be accessed by individuals formally approved by the University Research Ethics and Governance Committee.

In the interviews, of course, we will be discussing professional life, and it may be helpful to express yourself through specific examples from your experience. When the interview data are processed, all potentially identifying examples that contribute to the theory will be generalised to the extent that it would be impossible to identify who said what. If any quotes are to be used in any form of publication, they will be attributed to a fake name (pseudonym) and will not possess any information that may be attributed to an individual.

Are there any advantages if I participate?

Because this self-funded project is about making business better ethically, through happiness, it would be ethically complicated to provide a personal 'reward' for participating.

However, at the end of the questionnaire, if you would like to indicate how long it took you to complete it, then I will use the 'pay it forward' principle to spend an equal amount of time dedicated to charitable causes in appreciation of your participation. I will do the same for all interviews.

You will have volunteered your time and attention to help me with this study, and your organisation's gatekeepers have volunteered for that to be possible, so I will personally spend every minute of the time you have given me on environmental, animal, and/or social causes (I will keep a record of this with the University). However busy (work) life may get, there is always room for kindness.

It is also customary for participants to receive feedback of an investigation's findings. For total transparency, the feedback will be the same for everyone because it will respect your shared interest in making your organisation the best it can be, whoever you are, whatever your role. I will give this feedback to your organisation's gatekeepers in the form of a report, as they have been kind to allow this research to take place; however they then wish to use the information is welcomed in the interest of promoting happiness at work and organisational success through collaboration. I endorse the report being shared with you all at [Solet].

Informed consent

For you to give informed consent, you must be happy that you have:

- read this participant information sheet,
- have had opportunity to consider the information about the study,
- have had opportunity to ask questions and receive satisfactory answers,
- Know that you are free to withdraw at any time without giving reason, without your legal rights being affected

For the questionnaire, written consent is not required as consent is implied by you completing the online questionnaire.

For the interviews, there is a consent form to be completed prior to an interview taking place. A copy has been attached to the email you received to access this participant information sheet. If required, further copies will be made available to all willing interview participants. If you would like a copy, please email **Samuel.Boyce@stu.mmu.ac.uk**.

What information about me will you collect and why?

If you wish to participate in the questionnaire, you will be asked for the following personal information:

- Name
- Age
- Gender
- Information about your role:
 - Duration at company
 - Whether full-/part-time
 - Whether in a probationary period
 - (Non-)managerial level
- Your perspectives of your organisation and your experience at work

This will be collected to understand more about the complex relationship between the management of an organisation's performance and the happiness of its members. The collective data from all respondents will be analysed in a process called 'structural equation modelling' to understand more about the interaction between organisations and their members.

If you wish to participate in the interview, you will be asked a short series of questions to gather your view on your work, happiness, and productivity. The information you provide will be used to study tensions and synergies between happiness and productivity at work to understand the conditions that may benefit both.

How will my information be stored and how will you look after it?

For the duration of the project your information will be stored securely on Manchester Metropolitan University servers and can only be accessed by personnel approved by Manchester Metropolitan University's Research Ethics and Governance Committee.

At the earliest opportunity, identifying data (e.g., names) will be separated from data that is to be analysed for the investigation. The identifying data will be stored in password protected files in a separate folder from the data being analysed. For the questionnaire data, unique numerical codes will be allocated to respondents so that data can be reunited if required (e.g., if someone requests to be removed from the dataset). For the interview data, fake names (pseudonyms) will be used, and the same security protocols followed as

for the questionnaire data. Any identifying information in audio recordings will be removed when transcribed. The anonymous transcripts and potentially-identifiable audio recording will be stored separately.

The online questionnaire is hosted by a Manchester Metropolitan University-approved software provider (Qualtrics). This means that Qualtrics will be a recipient of the personal data provided, which has been kept to a minimum required to process the data accurately. Here is a link to the Qualtrics Privacy Statement: <https://www.qualtrics.com/privacy-statement/>.

As Manchester Metropolitan University remains responsible for the retention of the data collected by the application, I will ensure the provider is in accordance with Manchester Metropolitan University retention and disposal requirements. Manchester Metropolitan University information security policies and procedures will be adhered to at all times. Here is a link to these policies and procedures: <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/about-us/professional-services/isds/information-security/policies>

How will you use my information?

The intention of this research is:

- to form part of a doctoral thesis.
- to be presented at an academic conference and be published in an academic journal (potentially multiple).
- to contribute to a report (with no identifiable personal information) that informs your organisation of the findings.

Your information will remain anonymous in all outputs.

Will my data be sent anywhere else, or shared with other people or organisations?

Once this investigation is complete, it is required that data underpinning a research output or of long-term value is made available to maximise the value of the results and preserve them for future use and reuse.

All data will be anonymised before it is shared in this way.

The anonymised research data will be shared via Manchester Metropolitan University's open access research repository e-space. This makes data discoverable and citable through the creation of a digital object identifier (DOI).

Standard University protocols will be followed to ensure shared data is findable, accessible, and reusable. This will be performed according to a standardised format, be given contextual information, and assigned a licence all ensure the data can be reused appropriately.

When will you destroy my information?

According to GDPR, personal data will be retained only for as long as is necessary to process the data. In accordance with Manchester Metropolitan University's Retention and Disposal Schedule, records that document the activities of this project will be retained for 10 years from the end of the project. At this point they will be reviewed for destruction.

Data Protection Law

Data protection legislation requires that we state the 'legal basis' for processing information about you. In the case of research, this is 'a task in the public interest.' If we use more sensitive information about you, such as information about your health, religion, or ethnicity (called 'special category' information), our basis lies in research in the public interest. Manchester Metropolitan is the Controller for this information and is responsible for looking after your data and using it in line with the requirements of the data protection legislation applicable in the UK.

You have the right to make choices about your information under the data protection legislation, such as the right of access and the right to object, although in some circumstances these rights are not absolute. If you have any questions, or would like to exercise these rights, please contact the researcher or the University Data Protection Officer using the details below.

You can stop being a part of the study at any time, without giving a reason. You can ask us to delete your data at any time, but it might not always be possible. If you ask us to delete information before 01/01/2023, we will make sure this is done. If you ask us to delete data after this point, we might not be able to. If your data is anonymised, we will not be able to withdraw it, because we will not know which data is yours.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The intention of this research is:

- to form part of a doctoral thesis.
- to be presented at an academic conference and be published in an academic journal (potentially multiple).
- to contribute to a report (with no identifiable personal information) that informs your organisation of the findings.

By default, your information will remain anonymous in all outputs.

Who has reviewed this research project?

The committed that has reviewed and approved this research is Manchester Metropolitan University's Research Ethics and Governance Committee. This committee can be contacted at **FOBLEthicsEnquiries@mmu.ac.uk**.

Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?

Samuel Boyce, Principal Investigator, **Samuel.Boyce@stu.mmu.ac.uk**

Maria Allen, Principal Supervisor, **M.Allen@mmu.ac.uk**, 0161 247 6527

Sarah Crozier, Secondary Supervisor, **S.Crozier@mmu.ac.uk**, 0161 247 3952

Kevin Albertson, Faculty of Business and Law Head of Research Ethics and Governance, **k.albertson@mmu.ac.uk**, 0161 247 3915

Manchester Metropolitan Data Protection Officer dataprotection@mmu.ac.uk
Tel: 0161 247 3331 Legal Services, All Saints Building, Manchester Metropolitan University,
Manchester, M15 6BH

UK Information Commissioner's Office

You have the right to complain directly to the Information Commissioner's Office if you would like to complain about how we process your personal data:

<https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>

THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROJECT

Appendix D. Semi-structured interview schedule

The semi-structured interviews are designed such that they are reasonably brief (although participants may talk for as long as they like). The questions are designed to be short and minimally leading, such that they cue respondents to openly express “whatever comes to the light of mind” (i.e., the phenomenon in the phaneron) (Parker, 1998:104; De Tienne, 2007:279). They are also intentionally repetitive for consistency purposes and to invite opportunities for interviewees to reiterate pertinent points and, perhaps, compare and contrast matters. They will be left to do this at their will and their responses will guide the discussion.

The initial question is broad and philosophical because it serves as a primer for the ensuing discussion. It will also provide valuable context for the question that immediately follows it.

Format and guiding questions:

[general greetings to ensure interviewee is comfortable and well]

Interviewer: *“Thank you for agreeing to this interview, I look forward to hearing your views. As the overall aim of this research is to explore worker happiness and productivity, the purpose of this interview is to gather your perspective. I have a few short, open guiding questions that are the same for all interviewees, but as there can be no right and wrong answers to them, please just express ‘whatever comes to the light of mind’...”*

So that I may analyse the data, I’ll need to record the interview. I want you to feel confident to speak your mind, so please know that everything we say here will be kept strictly confidential, you will be entirely anonymous, and you’re free to withdraw from the study at any point.

Do you have any questions at this stage?

Are you happy to begin? I will begin recording if so.”

[personal question section]

- In its most general sense in life, why do you do what you do?
- Why do you work for [org.]?
- On a scale of 1-10, with 1 as the least and 10 as the most possible, how satisfied are you with your job?
 - [wait for score and ask... “why ‘#’?”, prompting opinions on good/bad]

[hypothetical question section]

- What would you say leads to optimal worker productivity?
- What would you say leads to optimal worker happiness?
- What would you say prevents optimal worker productivity?
- What would you say prevents optimal worker happiness?

[thank interviewee for their time and sharing their views. Ask if they have anything more to ask/share]

The interviewer will make paper notes during the interviews and digitise them as soon as possible afterwards. The paper notes will then be destroyed. All interviews will be analysed in a coding software familiar to the Principal Investigator: NVivo.

Appendix E. Interview consent form

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Probity for people and performance: in search of the eudaimonic organisation to escape the happy/productive worker paradox

Participant Identification Number:

		Please initial your choice:	YES	NO
1	I confirm that I have read the Participant Information Sheet version 2.0, date 31/10/2022 for the above study.			
2	I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.			
3	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected.			
4	I agree to participate in the project to the extent of the activities described to me in the participant information sheet.			
5	I agree to my participation being audio recorded for analysis (audio will be used to create verbatim transcripts only).			
6 (optional)	I agree to my participation being video recorded for analysis (video will be converted to audio immediately following interview and the video file destroyed at this point).			
7	I understand and agree that anonymous data collected during the project will be shared with [Solet], UK.			
8	I understand and agree that my words may be quoted anonymously in research outputs.			
9	I wish to be informed of the outcomes of this research. I can be contacted at:			
10	I give permission for the researchers named in the participant information sheet to contact me in the future about this research or other research opportunities.			
11	I give permission for a fully anonymised version of the data I provide to be deposited in an Open Access repository so that it can be used for future research and learning.			

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature